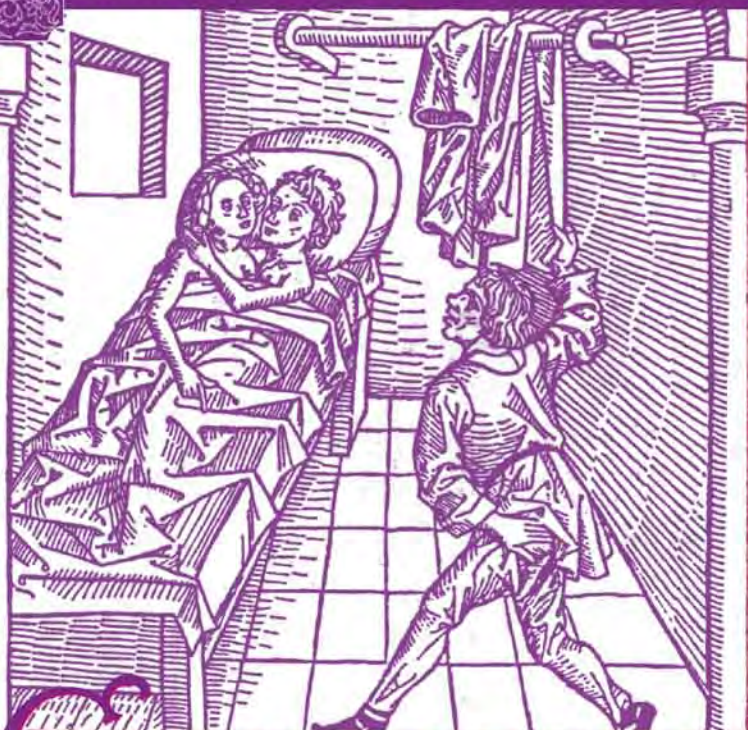


EARLY MODERN CULTURAL STUDIES, 1500-1700



CONSTRUCTIONS
of FEMALE
HOMOEROTICISM
in EARLY MODERN
DRAMA

DENISE A. WALEN



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HOMOEROTICISM IN EARLY
MODERN DRAMA

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For Dianne

“For if your house were gold, and she not in it,
Sir, I should count it but a cage to whistle in.”

John Fletcher, *The Pilgrim*

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INTRODUCTION

I DRAMATIC CONSTRUCTIONS OF FEMALE HOMOEROTICISM

A decade ago, the consensus among scholars was that while early modern literary forms carried representations of male homoeroticism, few texts of any kind, including drama, presented female homoeroticism. Literary critics failed to identify a significant cultural discourse surrounding desire between women.¹ Within the past ten years, in an attempt to amend the deficiency, scholarship on female homoeroticism in early modern literature has attempted to recover and interpret unknown, neglected, or forgotten texts.² This book participates in that recovery. By exploring representations of love and desire between female characters in dozens of plays, it argues that the dramatic literature of late-sixteenth- and early-seventeenth-century England recognized and constructed richly diverse tropes of female homoerotic desire.

Constructions of Female Homoeroticism in Early Modern Drama continues the project of (re)identifying female homoeroticism in literature by focusing on the creation of homoerotic scenarios between female characters, or female subject positions, in English drama. While many of these plays result in heterosexual couplings despite their engagement with a homoerotic narrative, the study is less concerned with what might be considered erasure, negation, or containment than with the fact that playwrights developed various constructs of female homoeroticism in the first place. English dramatists carefully opened narrative spaces in which to position two female characters in erotic contexts. The more than seventy plays discussed in this study include both minor, passing references to female–female sexual activity or erotic interests and long, involved plot situations that complicate the narrative action. Constructs of desire between women in early modern drama can be classified within several distinct categories. Paying particular attention to the ways in which English playwrights constructed and represented female homoeroticism in their texts, this book analyzes the taxonomy—from predatory to utopian—which these early modern

writers used to represent that desire. Playwrights placed female characters in erotic situations with other female characters in: (1) playful scenarios of mistaken identity, (2) in anxious moments of erotic intrigue, (3) in predatory situations, and (4) in enthusiastic, utopian representations of romantic love.

Constructions of female homoerotic desire within these four divisions vary as well. Erotic attachments between women appear as equivalents to heterosexual relationships; as normalized unions in women-inclusive communities; as attraction between mistress and servant, companion, friend, waiting woman, or maid; as adolescent affection; as misled attraction; as an acknowledged, accepted adult desire or unrequited love; as fantasy, sexual tutelage, manipulation, or pathology; as initiation to prostitution; or as sexual assault. Even more variations exist within constructs that include cross-dressed characters such as the disguised heroine who finds herself the object of another woman's—the desiring subject's—affections. Disguised heroines purposely seduce other women for profit, revenge, or to keep them away from men. They encourage flirtations, or return female affection. Conversely, other disguised heroines shrink from or assertively reject the attraction of other women. Desiring subjects fall in love with or lust after disguised women. They sometimes attempt to seduce disguised heroines they do not love. They also find themselves in love with men dressed as women. In addition, while homoerotic scenarios, whether they include cross-dressed heroines or not, often end with heterosexual unions, some texts provide narratives in which female homoerotic desire neither becomes an insignificant development in the life experience of a character, nor threatens the patriarchal structure of society, nor is replaced by a heterosexual commitment.

This variety is at once exciting and frustrating. On one hand, the wealth of material and diversity of representations demonstrate that female homoeroticism enjoyed a more prominent position in early modern culture than previously suspected. *Constructions* contributes to the historical study of female homoeroticism by articulating the presence of female same-sex desires and practices within dramatic structures. These literary representations both acknowledge and generate a cultural awareness of these desires and practices. The volume and complexity of female homoerotic constructions in the plays under investigation reveal a rhetorical knowledge of female homoeroticism—the development of the trope over time publicly manifests cultural knowledge. How could constructions of erotic energy between female characters exist in dramatic literature if playwrights had no knowledge of same-sex attractions or sexual experience? Too many examples exist

for the representations to be coincidental. Further, why would playwrights construct so many homoerotic scenarios in dramatic form if they had no expectation that their audience would understand them? These various and contradictory representations of female homoeroticism reveal a tacit, if not fully articulated, public cultural discourse. As a form of popular entertainment presented through oral and visual performance rather than print, and therefore accessible to illiterate spectators, drama reached a broader audience than other literature. Plays convey some idea of the circulation of knowledge regarding love and sexual desire between women that was available to common English men and women. The plays indicate an awareness of female homoerotic desire in early modern England and belie statements that literary evidence of homoeroticism was concerned primarily with men.

On the other hand, what can these numerous and often contradictory constructions reveal about the lived experience of women who loved and sexually desired other women in early modern England? Ultimately, this becomes a self-defeating question. The emphasis must shift from a sociological or psychological investigation to an analysis of dramatic convention and dramaturgical strategy. These plays do not reveal or explain a facet of the erotic lives of early modern English women; rather, they illuminate the cultural perceptions surrounding female homoeroticism as expressed in dramatic form. The plays convey that playwrights enjoyed a great deal of latitude to construct scenarios both of praise or condemnation. Dramaturgical practices, especially the manipulation of gender, language, and genre, determined to a large extent whether the society created within the text tolerated female homoeroticism and by extension encouraged the spectator to accept and even enjoy those representations, or whether the desire appeared truly transgressive and unacceptable.

Constructions argues that female homoeroticism was primarily suspect and threatening but that playwrights found wonderfully inventive ways to construct the desire and introduce it as not only tolerable but also pleasurable. The desire was always dangerous but, at least in drama, playwrights found ways to circumvent social fears and expectations; hence the need to couch constructions of female homoeroticism in subtextual strategies. They succeeded partly because they presented constructs of homoerotic desire—or affinity/friendship/homosociality, eroticism in general—rather than sexual experiences. Homoeroticism, especially a romanticized view of female companionship, was rendered acceptable while homosexuality would have been, and in the plays was, condemned or rejected. In general, the more sexually explicit the

desire that one female character consciously directs toward another female character, the more implicit the condemnation directed at the character and her apparently deviant desire. However, overt declarations of romantic love, sexually untainted, represent the most socially acceptable form of female homoeroticism in these plays.

Dramatists also succeeded because they used scenarios of female homoeroticism as a caution against unsociable forms of behavior or a corrective to that behavior. However, rarely is the desire itself the ultimate object of concern. Rather, playwrights use female homoeroticism to address issues of social, religious, or political disorder and address all manner of moral, emotional, and intellectual deficiency such as greed, arrogance, lust, infidelity, religious apostasy, and various forms of political discord. Mild forms of social abnormality or misconduct, ones that are easily corrected, necessitate moderate punishment—for example, a female character might suffer a misguided and unrequited desire for another woman disguised in male attire—but conclude with redemption and inclusion. Only the most aberrant forms of behavior, equated with equally aberrant sexual desires, result in the expulsion of certain characters. Anxious and predatory scenarios are the ones that represent the most severely disordered characters and societies and sometimes end with the tragic loss of even innocent victims. Playful constructions of female homoeroticism present fairly benign indiscretions that are easily amended. Utopian scenarios romanticize female attachments and are less cautionary or corrective than exemplary.

The diversity of homoerotic constructions in the plays mirrors the varied cultural attitudes toward love between women—from the utopian to the predatory—that existed in early modern Europe. These attitudes attribute multiple and contradictory values to homosexual practice and homoerotic desire. While sources of nonfiction identify same-sex sexual activity and perceive it as a threat, fictional literature primarily depicted narratives of homoerotic desire and constructed that desire subtextually, often through a cross-dressed female character, in nonthreatening scenarios. Similar to other fictional literature, drama navigated around offensive or provoking representations of female same-sex behavior because playwrights manipulated the construction of female–female desire to represent homoerotic images without convening negative significations. A large number of plays in this study evoke the specter of transgressive female sexuality through the cross-dressed heroine only to subvert adverse connotations with competing signs of acceptable behavior. By relying on cultural expressions of female homosexuality, playwrights imaginatively presented tropes of female homoerotic desire without accruing transgressive signification.³

Playwrights presented a variety of homoerotic images and manipulated the representational frame of the desire along a continuum—from utopian connections to threatening manifestations of erotic manipulation. Praised, pitied, or reviled, but far from nonexistent and insignificant, the construction of female homoeroticism in dramatic literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth century belongs to a rich and varied cultural paradigm.

Of course, female homoeroticism is difficult to identify because the space that accommodates a perception of female same-sex desire in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century drama is a conceptual terrain. Female homoerotic desire in literature exists in the liminal space of subplots and subtexts, in marginal narrative spaces of latent characterizations and repressed situations. English playwrights seem most comfortable relegating female homoeroticism to minor references, vestigial characters, and constrained expressions. In early modern drama, female homoerotics emerge surreptitiously from the subtext by means of innuendo, disguise, misconception, and allusion. Moreover, when it does appear, homoerotic desire deliberately goes unfulfilled. Same-sex desire is, as Terry Castle indicates, a spectral image haunting the heterosexual narrative, whose presence is more often denied than acknowledged.⁴ Lillian Faderman suggests that in identifying homoerotic literature we should expand our search by “considering works in which lesbianism is not the clear center but something encoded within the piece in various ways.”⁵ Similarly, Marilyn Farwell persuasively argues for actively reading homoerotic subtexts in narratives that are otherwise heterosexually constructed. A homoerotically coded subject, she theorizes, can become the center of a homoerotic narrative disrupting the central narrative of the dominant heterosexual plot.⁶ Despite its liminal existence then, Castle, Faderman, and Farwell provide the theoretical position that renders tangible the presence of female homoeroticism in early modern English drama.

The work of scholars in various fields has also demonstrated that female same-sex desire and sexual activity were recognizable well before sexologists categorized a stereotypical lesbian identity in the late nineteenth century.⁷ Nearly a decade ago, Martha Vicinus called for a historical reexamination of the lesbian. She stated that “with historical primness, we have refused to call anybody a lesbian before the late nineteenth century, arguing that the word was not used before then.”⁸ *Constructions* endeavors to identify the structures of female homoerotic signification in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century drama—a task fraught with difficulties since, as Vicinus cautions, “sexual behavior is polymorphous, changeable and impossible to define absolutely.”⁹

While Vicinus, Faderman, Castle, Farwell, and others advanced the study of female–female sexuality in early modern literatures by advocating it as a legitimate theoretical approach, their terminology and assumptions can be problematic, as evidenced by the forum on Bernadette J. Brooten’s expansive study *Love Between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism*. David M. Halperin criticizes Brooten for applying “modern sexual categories in a transhistorical reality” that lead her readers to assume that modern conceptions of sexuality correspond to those in the classical world.¹⁰ He has no objection to her framing the study in terms of “lesbianism” or claiming its importance to “lesbian history,” but believes Brooten has gone too far in allowing the structure of her project to overwhelm its content by obscuring elemental details of cultural and historical specificity. Ann Pellegrini finds that Brooten’s concept of female same-sex love and sexual activity derives from “contemporary politics” rather than “early Christianity,” and that she applies “a lesbian-feminist and utopian reading to female homoerotics.”¹¹ Brooten counters that Halperin and Pellegrini’s claims of anachronism issue from their own application of a male pederastic model as the paradigm for all homosexual relations, both male and female. She maintains that her findings on ancient female sexuality provide an expansive examination of the various erotic configurations between women and that Halperin and Pellegrini fail to identify the ways in which her new taxonomies support the argument of historical discontinuity.¹²

This kind of argument, ostensibly between essentialist and constructionist theories, impacts any study that deals with issues of early modern sexuality. *Constructions* maintains that certain women in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe felt sexual desire for other women and engaged in sexual activities with one another, that knowledge of female same-sex desire and its expression in physical action existed in early modern culture, and that English playwrights represented those desires in dramatic literature. However, sexual desires and practices, as well as reactions to sexual behaviors, vary according to historical, cultural, and geographical place and time. Race, class, influences of religion, and the means and methods of transmitting erotic and sexual knowledge also affect those desires, practices, and reactions. Prudently, then, contemporary scholars are wary of describing same-sex desires and practices with contemporary language. Although “lesbian” as a term identifies women who love and have sexual relations with other women, it also connotes a specific twentieth-century understanding of sexual identity, an identity that research suggests did not exist in early modern cultures. Throughout this study, therefore, the phrase

“female homoeroticism” defines representations of women’s desire for other women. The book also differentiates between representations of desire and those of sexual activity. However, the term “lesbian” will continue to be used in reference to scholars’ work that initially used that terminology.¹³

The advent of the new millennium witnessed publications of important new work on female homoerotics in literature. Such work confronts and complicates theories suggested by Vicinus, Faderman, Farwell, and Castle by carefully analyzing early modern literature through a critical analysis of its historical and cultural specificity. For example, Theodora A. Jankowski’s *Pure Resistance* posits the notion of queer virginity—a theory that virgins represent a “queer space” by posing a “threat to the sexual economy” since they disrupt “the regime of heterosexuality.”¹⁴ Jankowski argues that female characters represent one of three types: queer virgins, who accept their destined marriages; queerer virgins, who challenge patriarchal marriage; or the queerest virgins, who reject marriage completely for non-patriarchal sexual systems or conduct.¹⁵ Kathryn Schwarz analyzes Amazonian representations in various early modern literatures, including several Shakespeare plays, and finds that the incongruity between gender and sex presented by the Amazon figure lead to an “assumption of deviant sexuality,” both homo- and heteroerotic.¹⁶ Harriette Andreadis suggests the evasive practices that literate women in early modern England used to construct socially acceptable homoerotic writing to other women separate from the transgressive discourse of male-authored work regarding female–female passion.¹⁷ Finally, a chapter of Valerie Traub’s book, *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England*, focuses on the unexceptional response to female homoerotics in narratives of romantic courtship.¹⁸ She theorizes that the representation of female–female desire between conventionally feminine characters, specifically what she identifies as “femme–femme” love or eroticized friendships between women, seems to have been acceptable as long as those relationships fail to threaten heterosexual unions. Female same-sex attractions progress unimpeded as long as they give way to patriarchal authority through marriage and heterosexual reproduction.

The studies by Jankowski, Schwarz, Andreadis, and Traub have contributed significant theories on female homoeroticism in early modern literature. All these works, especially those by Andreadis and Traub, have uncovered a wealth of historical documentation that reference female–female homoerotic desire and expand our knowledge of homoeroticism exponentially. However, the narrow corpus of dramatic literature investigated in each of these works limits the

interpretive project as it regards early modern English drama. For example, Traub, while rejecting the notion of identity politics, seems invested in uncovering “lesbian affects” by ignoring the wealth of homoerotic tensions created by playwrights using the convention of cross-dressing.¹⁹ Instead, her focus on “femme–femme” love in “heteroerotic courtship plots” leads to the theory that instances of female same-sex desire exist only in comic narratives because “one purpose of comedy is to naturalize the expulsion of undesirable social relationships in order to resecure the social order.”²⁰ While I understand Traub’s desire to locate homoerotic affinities between traditionally feminine women, I believe that ignoring the importance of cross-dressing to the construction of homoerotic tensions inadequately addresses the diverse representations of female homoerotic desire in English drama.

Constructions argues that the ability to read female homoeroticism in early modern drama was encoded in the imaginative realm of a spectator’s psyche, created when textual events, situations, or relationships were filtered through the existing cultural file of female homosexual behavior and activity.²¹ Tracey Sedinger has argued that the cross-dressed character specifically generated homoerotic desire that spectators in the early modern theatre “recognized.”²² Though early modern playwrights did not script instances of female–female sexual acts, members of the audience must have known such behavior was possible. Early modern English playwrights relied on spectators to make connections between situations represented in their plays and various cultural understandings of female homosexual behavior.²³ Of course, it is impossible to know exactly what kinds of associations, if any, an early modern spectator made between a dramatic performance and the surrounding culture. However, unless early modern drama provided multiple viewing positions whereby audience members could perceive female homoerotics encoded in the presentation, those homoerotic scenarios became impotent dramatic constructs. Why would they appear so frequently if the audience could not decipher their signification within the text? In a theatre reliant on audience imagination, how easy would it have been to hear the sexual potential in homoerotic desires between two female characters? Spectators cognizant of female homoerotic desire and sexual activity must have understood representations of female same-sex desire subtextually encoded in the presentation even when that desire was not implicitly articulated. The playhouse was an imaginative space where two female bodies erotically positioned in the narrative could signify sexual practice.

Educated individuals in late-sixteenth-century Europe did, in fact, piece together a female same-sex sexual paradigm from an eclectic mix of available social and literary sources. Brantôme's *Lives of Gallant Ladies*, begun sometime before 1584, provides an example of the various sources and diverse literature used to identify female homoeroticism and demonstrates the kind of connections that would cater to a perception of female homoeroticism in early modern English drama.²⁴ Brantôme's book satirizes life—primarily the sexual exploits—at the French court of Henri II and, although fictional, one modern commentator argues that Brantôme's "wide experience and natural powers of observation turn it into a social document."²⁵ Elizabeth Wahl, in *Invisible Relations: Representations of Female Intimacy in the Age of Enlightenment*, also uses Brantôme and other sources to argue that female homosexuality was a "conceptual category" in both early modern England and France.²⁶ Brantôme addresses sexuality early in his book. In the first discourse, on the subject of adultery, Brantôme examines a broad range of sexual acts between female partners to determine whether women who make love to each other can be guilty of adultery. To introduce the topic, Brantôme interprets several works by Lucian, Martial, and Juvenal as describing female homosexual activity and invokes Sappho as an ancient example of a woman who loved other women sexually. He also uses Agnolo Firenzuola's 1541 *On the Beauty of Women*, with its mythological explanation for homosexual attractions, as a source document.²⁷ Brantôme establishes a historical precedent for female–female sexual practices that he links to contemporary behaviors. Ignoring geographical distinctions, Brantôme writes about sixteenth-century women from across the continent who enjoy sex with other women, both as a precursor to their relationships with men and as an exclusive desire. He even identifies several by name and describes their exploits, which include tribadism and the use of dildos in female–female sexual encounters. That a sixteenth-century individual could and did contextualize female homosexual behavior from disparate historical and geographical sources, comparing fictional and social narratives, is clear from Brantôme's example in *Lives of Gallant Ladies*. Certainly, English writers and spectators were capable of the same cognitive practice.

II ROBERT WILSON'S *THE THREE LADIES OF LONDON*

Constructions of female homoeroticism in early modern English drama require spectators to make the same kind of connections that

Brantôme made in the *Lives of Gallant Ladies*. The plays discussed in the following chapters were informed by and echo overt representations of and commentaries on female homosexual behavior and homoerotic desire expressed in various materials available in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England. A brief look at two texts printed in London in 1584, Robert Wilson's play *The Three Ladies of London* and Pietro Aretino's *Ragionamenti*, illustrates the kind of associative narratives available to spectators in London.

The *Ragionamenti* is a lurid fictional account of a woman who has been a nun, wife, and courtesan. When the main character recounts her early life as a nun, the text presents a conventional description of convent life as a location of adventurous sexual behavior, where nuns and monks indiscriminately copulate in orgiastic groupings.²⁸ The text also presents several striking instances of female–female sexual actions. Aretino's primary speaker, Nanna, remembers voyeuristically watching eight bodies, both male and female, skewered together at the same time, with the men and women both penetrating same- (the women using dildos) and opposite-sex partners, both vaginally and anally.²⁹ The work also describes an occasion when Nanna and another nun became so aroused by looking at a small pornographic book that they took turns sexually satisfying each other with a glass dildo:

My little friend arranged it so nicely between her thighs, that one would have thought it was a man's machine pointed before the object of his temptation. I threw myself on my back, . . . my legs placed upon her shoulders, and she, putting it sometimes into my proper opening, sometimes into the smaller one, soon made me finish what I had to do; then, in her own turn, she took the place I was in, and I rendered her a thousand for one.³⁰

In this scenario, the convent may be a ghettoized site of same-sex eroticism due to a presumed scarcity of men; after all, Nanna's actions with the nun might have arisen solely from the need to assuage their sexual arousal in the absence of a male partner. However, part 2 of the *Ragionamenti* advances the possibility that one woman may find another woman sexually stimulating. Late in the dialogue, a new character, a midwife, having watched a couple make love, explains her reaction to the body of the woman, which she describes in exhaustive detail:

My God, her neck! And her breasts, . . . those two tits would have corrupted virgins and made martyrs unfrock themselves. I lost my wits when I saw that lovely body with its navel like a jewel at its center, . . . But her thighs, her legs, her feet, hands, and arms! . . . The front parts

of her body drove me wild, but the wonder and marvel which really drove me wild were due to her shoulders, her loins, and her other charms. I swear to you . . . that as I looked at her, I put my hand on my you-know-what and rubbed it just the way a man does when he hasn't a place to put it.³¹

Here, unlike the convent scenes, Aretino presents a specifically homoerotic desire—the midwife's long description eliminates the male lover from her erotic reverie and her enjoyment of the female body exclusively leads the midwife to masturbate. Further, her remark about corrupting virgins suggests that she believes all women are susceptible to sexual arousal by other women. *Ragionamenti* leaves little doubt that women were sexually attracted to one another and that a homoerotic desire was sufficiently stimulating to evoke a sexual action.

English readers and writers knew Aretino's *Ragionamenti* well. Ian Moulton examined the complex nature of Aretino's popularity in early modern England. At first, his writing was considered important social criticism; however, interest in Aretino's work devolved into prurient regard for its sexual explicitness.³² Either way, the text enjoyed wide circulation in England. According to Saad El-Gabalawy, allusions to both the *Ragionamenti* and to Aretino's *Sonetti* appear in the writing of Spenser, Robert Greene, Gabriel Harvey, Thomas Nashe, Thomas Lodge, John Marston, John Donne, Ben Jonson, Thomas Middleton, and others.³³ Aretino's work, then, with its portrayals of female homoeroticism, was familiar to English playwrights who could draw upon its erotic knowledge in their playtexts. The popularity of the *Ragionamenti* also suggests that at least literate spectators were initiated into a homoerotic awareness. What then would audience members acquainted with the *Ragionamenti* or other examples of female homoeroticism make of Robert Wilson's play *The Three Ladies of London* with its obvious homoerotic tension?

The printed version of Wilson's comic morality, *The Three Ladies of London*, appeared the same year that Aretino's *Ragionamenti* was published in London. Wilson's play is likely to have appeared regularly in the repertoire of the Earl of Leicester's Company to which he belonged before being taken up by the Queen's Company and, although its production history is unknown, was doubtless performed by that troupe as well. Reprinted in 1592, the popularity of the play caused Wilson to write a sequel titled *The Three Lords and Three Ladies of London*. *The Three Ladies* also enjoys the dubious distinction that Stephen Gosson attacks it by name in *Playes Confuted in Five Actions*.³⁴ Although an obscure text now, except for the interest that

scholarly criticism has focused on its anti-Semitic discourse, clearly the play enjoyed notoriety in its time.³⁵ As the title page states, here “is notablie Declared and Set foorth, how by the meanes of Lucar, Love and Conscience is so corrupted, that the one is married to Dissimulation, the other fraught with all abhomination.” As Wilson’s satirical allegory begins, Conscience lives with Love and Simplicitie, attempting an honest though humble life. In contrast, Lucar fills her days with fraud, extortion, prostitution, and murder. She preys upon Conscience and eventually bankrupts then seduces her. The “abhomin-ation” of Conscience is not merely her criminal descent, but also her acquiescence to the erotic seductions of another woman.

Conscience and Lucar spar with one another throughout the play and the text continually returns to their relationship. Conscience asserts a robust, though not dogmatic, Christian ethic in the face of Lucar’s dismissive, callous hedonism, creating a tension that draws the women together. Late in the play, Lucar approaches Conscience during the depths of her poverty and offers financial assistance. Conscience waivers, rationalizing that everyone follows Lucar, and ultimately consents to keep the cottage she rents from Lucar at the disposal of her new mistress—a place where her wealthy landlord can pass the time with her “friends.” For Conscience, the price of stability is prostitution and Wilson constructs an overtly homoerotic scenario to accentuate the depravity of her submission. When Conscience begins to yield, Lucar detects some hesitation, dismisses a servant who has brought in a chest of gold, and seals their bargain with a surprisingly seductive speech:

The more I doe behold this face, the more my minde doth vaunt:
 This face is of favor, these cheekes are reddy and white,
 These lips are cherry red, and full of deepe delight.
 Quicke rowling eyes, her temples hygh, and forhead white as snowe,
 Her eye-browes seemely set in frame, with dimpled chinne below:
 O how beautie hath adorned thee with every seemely hew,
 In limmes, in lookes, with all the rest, proportion keeping dew:
 Sure I have not seene a finer soule in every kinde of part,
 I can not choose but kisse thee with my lippes that love thee with my
 heart. (sig. E1v)³⁶

Conscience succumbs not only to the proffered money but to the erotic interest Lucar shows in her. The speech, with its promised kiss, is an unprecedented manifestation of female homoerotic desire. Lucar’s sensual corruption of the innocent Conscience—perhaps caressing her cheek, touching her mouth, holding her chin, and passionately kissing

her—would have been visually striking in a theatre where female characters rarely appear together in intimate stage scenes.

The Three Ladies of London presents a homoerotically coded allegory about the corrupting influence of money—commerce, a greedy woman, perverts purity, in the form of Conscience. On one level, capital gain debases moral virtue, but on another, one woman uses sexual flirtation to seduce another woman. Conscience desires “Lucar” in both the abstract and in her physical female form. In fact, although Conscience hesitates over potential financial ease—she has spent most of the play after all condemning the debasing quality of wealth and espousing the Christian virtues of poverty—she ultimately accepts Lucar because she offers more than money. Conscience is seduced not by currency but by physical desire for another woman and, in Wilson’s play, both urges are damned.

An early modern audience member or reader, especially one familiar with Aretino’s tales of the midwife and the convent from his *Ragionamenti*, might imaginatively expand the erotic plane of the relationship between Conscience and Lucar. In fact, Lucar’s seduction of Conscience resembles the erotically charged description of the promiscuous midwife recalling her autoerotic ecstasy at the sight of a female body as both she and Lucar catalog the allure of a woman’s physical features. Conceiving that Lucar and Conscience might satisfy each other sexually, knowing from Aretino’s writing that women certainly could, must have been possible for the early modern imagination, especially given the sexualized context of prostitution into which Lucar seduces Conscience. Even without Aretino, the play assumes some knowledge of homoeroticism as it presents the possibility of a sexual liaison between women; Wilson’s metaphor comparing erotic seduction with greed seems to presume some awareness of the social contempt directed at female same-sex eroticism.

III REPRESENTATIONS OF FEMALE HOMOEROTICISM IN DRAMATIC LITERATURE

Wilson’s play was one of the first representations of female homoeroticism in the commercial theatre of early modern England. Like many of the playwrights who followed, Wilson relied on ambiguity to construct a homoerotic scenario. Unlike Wilson, however, not all playwrights condemned female–female desire and sexual interest. Dramatic literature represents a range of attitudes toward female homoeroticism. Some dramatic literature represented erotic attraction or physical contact between women as chaste but preferable to sex

with men. Take, for example, Henry Glapthorne's *The Hollander* (1636). Disdainful of Popinjay's overtures, the emotionally cool Dalinea tells him that a woman's relationship with a man should resemble a woman's relationship with other women: "that every woman ought / To love a man with that indifferent heate / She fancies other women, without sence / Of difference twixt the Sexes" (sig. E1).³⁷ Although Dalinea's reference to the "indifferent heate" of female-female unions allays their sexual tension, her comment implies a veiled preference for relationships with women. The implication is that heterosexual relationships are too passionately intense and that love between women, because more rational and more chaste, is a preferable model. Such idealism reflects notions of platonic love popular at the Caroline court. A similar statement about chaste relations between women occurs in John Fletcher and Philip Massinger's *The Sea Voyage* (1622). The Amazonian Rossella, warning her shipwrecked female companions against the male intruders newly landed on their island, questions, "Can nothing preswade you / To love your selves, and place your happinesse / In cold and chaste embraces of each other" (sig. Bbbbb1v).³⁸ The answer to her question is an obvious "No" for Rossella, and the play, in general, takes for granted that women hold no sexual thrill for one another. Her rejection of men is a symptom of grief over the supposed loss of her husband and when he is restored Rossella abandons her martial tone.

These two plays by Glapthorne, Fletcher, and Massinger ultimately deny the existence of an erotic response between women by identifying female relationships as dispassionate and physical contact between women as cold and chaste. Protestations of indifference defend Dalinea from assumptions that a woman cool to male advances has found sensual pleasure in female companionship, and those of chastity contradict the possibility that Rossella and her companions used each other to assuage their sexual urges during their long years of isolation. However, declarations of restraint and purity evoke the specter of license and corruption: Rossella suggests that the women have found comfort with "each other" when she argues that the presence of men should not alter their current arrangement. These three playwrights construct potentially homoerotic images or scenarios in order to dismiss or invalidate them; however, the constructions should not be ignored because they are eventually severed.

If physical contact between women is not chaste, then it is often represented as improper. Massinger's play, *The Picture* (1629), clearly presents female-female relations, or at least physical contact, as inappropriate. Honoria, the queen of Hungary, obsessively jealous over

the married Sophia's purity, unsuccessfully sends courtiers to seduce her. The queen eventually reconciles with Sophia's marital fidelity and eagerly journeys to meet her former victim, but when Sophia stoops to kiss her robe, Honoria stops her, saying, "You stoope to low / To her whose lipps would meete with yours" (sig. M3v).³⁹ Sophia complies for the queen's "pleasure," but finds it "prepostrous" for "women / Soe to encounter" (sig. M3v-M4). Exactly what Sophia finds absurd about women kissing each other in greeting is unclear. She chides her husband that his "wanton kisses" (sig. M4) are still on the queen's lips, which constructs the action of the kiss between the women as more sexual than salutatory. Furthermore, because Honoria attempted to manipulate her sexually, Sophia's comment seems to issue from physical aversion and discomfort rather than proprieties of social rank. Sophia's declaration and the context of the kiss render it an unnatural sexual act.

Playwrights also used male characters to remark on the impossibility or impropriety of female-female sexuality. In George Chapman's *Monsieur D'Olive* (1605), Vandome chides his friend Eurione for her melancholic vow to remain a virgin after the death of a friend: "Now heaven forbid; women in Love with women; / Loves fire shines with too mutuall a refraction"(sig. C2).⁴⁰ Vandome refuses to believe that one woman could feel passionately for another: "Well well, there is some other Humor stirring, / In your young bloud then a dead womans Love" (sig. C2v). According to Vandome, the similarity between women negates the possibility of sexual interest. Jasper Mayne's *The Amorous Warre* (1628-48) presents a comparable attitude toward female sexual unions when three cowardly courtiers offer to protect two women as an excuse to escape wartime combat. Arguing that the women's days will be boring without men, the courtiers suggest that their nights will be even worse: "shall your *Women* keep you / Awake with amorous Tales? Troth, Ladies, Story / Is a dead Thing, if not reduc'd to practise. / Say, to delude the tediousness oth' Night, / You should share ith' same bed. Two oth' same Sex, / Make but one in th' affaires of Love" (sig. B4).⁴¹ Women may turn to one another in the absence of men, the courtiers argue, but their amorous pursuits lack a necessary phallic element for sexual satisfaction and are mere delusion. Henry Burnell's *Landgartha* (1639-40) also dismisses female-female unions. The plot follows the valiant trials of its title character, a Norwegian noblewoman who leads a female army against Frolo, King of Sweland. During the battle, the lecherous Frolo responds to a female combatant's rejection with: "Plague on you for a company of spitefull, / Venomous tongued bitches. Ye had rather

lie / With the worst Hynde of your owne, than the best of us" (sig. C1).⁴² In this context, the word "Hynde" suggests at least two readings: that the women prefer servants to the Swedes as sexual partners, or that they would rather lie with other women. Since Landgartha has rallied her peers in an Amazonian camp, Frolo's derision is more likely aimed at female same-sex unions. Chapman, Mayne, and Burnell suggest a deep male aversion to, discomfort with, and dismissal of female-female unions, although neither Mayne nor Burnell place their statements in the mouths of credible characters, which makes them more slanderous than critical.

Male anxiety over women enjoying erotic pleasures without male partners was explicitly critiqued by at least two English playwrights. John Fletcher's *The Woman's Prize or, the Tamer Tamed* (1610) provides one example. Fiona McNeill reads the play in the context of masterless women, who were a very real aspect of early modern London. The play, an obvious response to Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew*, also bears echoes of *Lysistrata* in that a group of women barricade themselves in a house, provoking a great deal of male anxiety. This "gynocentric" space, according to McNeill, is a site of eroticized female union. According to one of the male characters, the house is a place of homoerotic extravagance. Jacques has "peep't in" on the women who "have got a stick of Fiddles" that "they firke . . . / In wondrous waies," they also "Daunce with their coats tuckt up to their bare breeches," and the "two grand Capitanos," [Byancha and Maria] "bid them [the women] kisse 'em" (sig. Ooooo2).⁴³ McNeill suggests that Jacques describes "an orgy of female masturbation and sexual congress" in which the women satisfy themselves sexually, perhaps with a dildo, and she ultimately makes a connection between female vagrancy or poverty and assumptions of sexual deviance.⁴⁴

An early play by Margaret Cavendish, published in the 1662 folio and probably written during the Interregnum, provides another indication of male anxiety over female-female sexuality. *The Comical Hash* opens with a gathering of men and women, among them the unmarried Lady Gadder and Lady Kindeling who "imbrace and kiss each other" (sig. Bbbbbbb1v) according to the stage directions.⁴⁵ In response to the action, one of the men erupts, saying, "Faith Ladyes Nature never made women to kiss each other, and therefore 'tis unnatural, and being unnatural it is unlawfull, and being unlawfull it ought to be forbidden" (sig. Bbbbbbb1v). His syllogism references moral and legal objections to female-female affection, but the dialogue that follows suggests that patriarchal assumptions and male fears drive his disgust. Women should not kiss other women, nor should they even kiss

men: their role is only to make themselves available to be kissed by men. Men instigate and control sexual actions while women remain passive. When Kindeling and Gadder kiss again, the man reasons that they must be doing so to provoke a sexual reaction from the men for why else should women kiss each other? Cavendish dismisses the men as “odd Creatures” (sig. Bbbbbb1v), and by extension dismisses their assumption that an erotic exchange between women serves only as a stimulus for male sexual pleasure.

Despite male anxieties that constructed female homoeroticism and sexual practices as either impossible or improbable, other playwrights, as Cavendish did, suggest that women enjoyed one another sexually. The wanton Corisca of Philip Massinger’s *The Bondman* (1623), agitated by the scarcity of male sexual partners available to her because of the current war, reminds herself that women have turned to other women for sexual fulfillment on such occasions: “Fie on these warres, / I am staru’d for want of action, not a gamester left / To keepe a woman play; if this world last / A little longer with us, *Ladyes must studie / Some new found Mistery, to coole one another, / We shall burne to Cinders else; I have heard there have beene / Such Arts in a long vacation*; would they were / Reveal’d to mee” (sig. E1).⁴⁶ Unfortunately, Massinger never “Reveal[s]” exactly what women do together. However, the statement suggests that Massinger’s spectators already know the sexual “Arts” women have practiced “to coole one another”; otherwise the insinuation becomes unintelligible.

Another sexually frustrated wife who turns to a woman for erotic enlightenment and fulfillment is Martha in Richard Brome’s *The Antipodes* (1638). Her feckless husband has refused to make love to Martha for the three years they have been married, and in her desperation she turns to Barbara, her new city neighbor, for guidance. Martha’s rudimentary knowledge and forced abstinence have left her mystified about sexual relations. She “cannot guess / What a man does in child-getting” (1.4.54–55).⁴⁷ When Martha tells Barbara of an earlier same-sex encounter, it is clear that she is not even aware that men are necessary for procreation: “I remember / A wanton maid once lay with me, and kiss’d / And clipp’d and clapp’d me strangely, and then wish’d / That I had been a man to have got her with child. / What must I then ha’ done?” (1.4.55–59). Although Martha calls her maid “wanton” and labels her uneasy remembrance of being kissed and fondled by the woman as strange, that sexual experience is her only and surely most potent to date. Therefore, to complete her sexual knowledge, Martha turns to a woman, asking Barbara if she will teach her about sex—“I’ll lie with you and practice, if you please. / Pray

take me for a night or two" (1.4.66–67). Martha's guileless request that Barbara become her sexual tutor presumes an acceptance of female same-sex unions. The play makes clear, however, that Martha seeks this assistance out of ignorance and only for the sake of her marriage rather than from direct homoerotic interest. Brome might have been aware of female same-sex practices but does not advocate them (a surprised and slightly annoyed Barbara ultimately finds another way to help Martha); he only traffics in the comic currency of Martha's sexual naiveté regarding female homoeroticism.

While playwrights very often evoked the specter of female homoerotic desire through its denial, as writers such as Brome, Massinger, Chapman, and Mayne have above, occasionally a playwright advocated the practice. One adherent of female–female sex is the young serving woman in Thomas Dekker's *Satiro-Mastix* (1602), who opens the play in preparations for an upcoming wedding:

Woman One: I pray thee tell mee, why doe they use at weddings to furnish all places thus, with sweet hearbes and flowers?

Woman Two: One reason is, because tis—ô a most sweet thing to lye with a man.

Woman One: I think tis a O more more more more sweet to lye with a woman. (sig. B1–B1v)⁴⁸

When Mario DiGangi interpreted this scene, he focused attention not on the first maid's assertion that she enjoys "more" pleasure from lying with women than with men, but on the second maid's reply, "I warrant all men are of thy minde" (sig. B1v). DiGangi argued that Dekker contains female homoeroticism by shifting the conversation to heteroerotic interests.⁴⁹ However, Traub cautions that containment is only half of the equation in this scene. Female same-sex desire must be evoked for it to be contained by heterosexual privilege.⁵⁰ While Dekker might have shifted "the terrain away from any consideration of a female desiring subject," as DiGangi claimed, he first had to construct the subject. What makes the exchange provocative, what propels it beyond the ordinary is not an avowal of heterosexual normativity, but the construction of a homoerotic subject—a woman who thinks blissfully of lying with other women.

In partnership with Thomas Middleton, Dekker is somewhat more circumspect about the homosexual interests of the titular character in *The Roaring Girl* (1604–10). In an article on Moll, examined in relation to the *Hic Mulier/Haec-Vir* controversy, Mary Beth Rose set the tone of much of the scholarship on the play by stating that "the figure

of the female in male attire is portrayed in both dramatic and social contexts with simultaneous admiration, desire, abhorrence, and fear."⁵¹ After Rose, most critics attempted to define Moll as a more or less subversive character, and all discussed the importance of her cross-dressing.⁵² Stephen Orgel reminds us that while English law did not legislate against transvestism, Moll's male "attire was felt to be lewd and lascivious" because it offered a sexual "provocation to the masculine libido."⁵³ Jean Howard examined Moll's sexual practices in the context of the early modern stage, which "drew upon, produced, and reproduced more than a single sexual discourse."⁵⁴ Howard is careful to point out that Moll's sexual behaviors and personal interests are neither clear nor singular, but that Dekker and Middleton allude to various erotic prospects and illustrate contrasting reactions to her sexuality. For example, when Mistress Gallipot assures Laxton that Londoners "will not stick to say she's [Moll] a man, and / some, both man and woman," he replies, "That were excellent: she might first cuckold the hus- / band and then make him do as much for the wife!" (2.1.209–12).⁵⁵ Laxton shows a mocking admiration for Moll's sexual versatility and is moved to seduce her, an attempt that fails miserably. In contrast, Sir Alexander Wengrave is appalled by Moll's possible hermaphroditism and/or sexual duplicity when he spies her being fitted for a new pair of pants, and by extension, according to Marjorie Garber, an artificial phallus.⁵⁶ Moll's own approach to her sexual pleasures is rational and unapologetic. In response to Sebastian's apparent proposal of marriage, Moll replies "I have no humour to marry, I love / To lie o' both sides o' th' bed myself; and again o' th' other / side . . . / I have the head now of myself, / And am man enough for a woman; marriage is but a chop- / ping and changing, where a maiden loses one head and / has a worse I' th' place" (2.2.36–45). While these lines might refer to Moll's sexual interest in women, as Howard argues, their ambiguity leaves them open to multiple interpretations.⁵⁷ What is true of Moll is that both the ambiguity of her sexuality and its apparent transgressiveness are part of her allure on stage.

The various dramatic texts discussed here display a broad representation of and response to female homoeroticism. At once accepted as a chaste passion; dismissed as an improbable fiction; condemned as a lewd practice; and supported as preferable to heterosexual intercourse; encountered as innocent practice, as substitution, as rebellion against male authority, or as its own pleasure in female relations; found among both transvestite or masculine women and traditionally feminine women, from aristocrats to vagrants to city and country wives, references to

female homoeroticism animate English drama. The examples given here display various and contradictory reactions to female same-sex erotics and only suggest the complex scenarios that playwrights construct when they incorporate female homoerotic desire as an important subtextual element in their plays.

IV ORGANIZATION

Theory about female homoeroticism in early modern drama has focused on a small body of texts, primarily Shakespearean. Continued investigations of plays such as *Twelfth Night*, *As You Like It*, *Two Noble Kinsmen*, and John Lyly's *Gallathea* provide salient, although insufficient, critical perspectives about female homoerotic desire and social structures in early modern England.⁵⁸ *Constructions* broadens the textual base for these explorations by examining a large number of plays, some of which have already received critical attention but most of which have not, and provides a comprehensive overview of the dramatic literature. From 1570 through the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, at least seventy plays present scenarios of female homoeroticism, sometimes as a major plot complication, sometimes as a passing reference. This study examines constructions of female homoeroticism—from oblique reference to latent desire and explicit sexual activity—and identifies variant connotations within and between the respective tropes. The following chapters delineate four basic constructions of female homoeroticism: a playfully emergent erotic, an anxiously emergent erotic, a predatory erotic, and a utopian erotic. Within each of these constructions, the work examines the narrative strategies playwrights employed to configure or signify female same-sex desire. To begin with, the reader is reminded that textual representations of female homoeroticism in dramatic literature are multiple and contradictory, expressing the complex social perception surrounding female same-sex love and sexual expression in early modern England.

Chapter 1 of *Constructions* examines representations of love, sex, or desire between women in nondramatic sources—literary, legal, and religious—that appeared by 1603 to establish that a cultural awareness of female homoeroticism was firmly in place in early modern England as the plays were being written. Not all the texts are of English origin, but they were available in England either through translations or English printings in their original language. The significance, of course, is that English playwrights and spectators had access to these textual images and they suggest the various representations, responses, assumptions, and attitudes that both author and viewer might have brought

to early modern drama. Chapter 1 also investigates the figure of the cross-dressed woman and the various and contradictory attitudes associated with female transvestism in early modern England. While cross-dressing was an important convention in constructing scenarios of homoerotic desire in dramatic literature, homoeroticism was not an inherent outcome of female cross-dressing. Chapter 1 ultimately argues that female homoeroticism and transvestism enjoyed a level of permissiveness in fictional narratives that contradicted the intolerance directed at both in nonfictional representations.

Chapter 2, "Playfully Emergent Lesbian Erotics," focuses primarily on comedies in which a cross-dressed heroine becomes the object of another woman's affection. Cross-dressing was a narrative strategy playwrights employed to develop homoerotic tensions within their plays—which they could heighten by foregrounding feminine characteristics in the cross-dressed heroine that contradicted her male disguise. Despite proscriptions against female transvestism, the comedies present a humorous image of female homoerotic desire that uses the social taboo of cross-dressing to titillate the audience. The cross-dressed figure appears as both aggressor and passive object in these scenarios, and different constructions of the character demonstrate various degrees of willingness to participate in amorous flirtation with other women, including physical manifestations of attraction.

Chapter 3 discusses scenarios of female homoeroticism in tragedy and tragicomedy. These plays also use the convention of the cross-dressed woman but the constructions shift their attention to the anxiety and discomfort felt by the disguised heroine or the woman who desires her, evoking a general sense of unease both within the characters and presumably the audience. Playwrights of tragedy and tragicomedy use advanced dramaturgical techniques to explore complex emotional reactions in their female characters unlike those found in comedy. The disguised heroines in these plays, with one notable exception, are more docile and reluctant than their sisters in the comedies and women pursue them more aggressively. They generally reveal their sexual identities midway through the texts rather than as a concluding gesture of the dramatic action, allowing time for reactions from those around them.

Chapter 4 turns to various genres of drama that represent a "Predatory Lesbian Erotic." Although some plays in chapter 4 still employ the transvestite character, most do not. Rather, one woman erotically manipulates another often less worldly, powerful, or sophisticated woman. These plays replicate the kind of relationship Wilson constructed between Lucar and Conscience in *The Three Ladies of*

London. Chapter 4 also addresses scenarios of sexual aggression or violation. Victims vary from equally assertive and mature women to naive adolescents, and the reasons motivating the seduction range from economic gain to power and revenge.

Chapter 5 looks at a large body of work, again without specific reference to genre that engages a "Utopian Lesbian Erotic" and constructs homoerotic desire as a constituent form of romantic love. These plays represent a conscious attraction of one woman for another, even when a cross-dressed character figures in the homoerotic construction. Here, a disguised heroine becomes erotically attracted to the woman, also disguised, in love with her. A conventionally feminine woman vigorously pursues a cross-dressed heroine after she reveals herself. Women fall in love with male characters disguised as women. Traditionally feminine women form erotic attachments or espouse their love for other women. On some level, each of these plays constructs an attraction or affection between two characters, both of whom have female identities. Curiously, physical manifestations of female sexual interest are less prevalent in these plays than in those in other chapters. Although highly sensual and imaginatively erotic, scenarios of homoerotic desire in these plays shy away from sexual actions.

In the world of early modern England, no specific law condemned sexual acts between women or prohibited the desire of one woman for another. However, legal sanction does not provide the only evidence that female homoeroticism existed in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century London. Abundant representations of homoerotic scenarios in early modern English drama evince a cultural knowledge of female homoeroticism. The network of relationships between plays and the awareness of erotic interest between women that existed in the theatrical space of representation afforded strategies for constructing scenarios of female homoerotic desire. A homoerotic tension framed the space where female characters were erotically placed together. Early modern playwrights constructed scenarios of female homoerotic desire through a careful manipulation of gender, genre, and language to avoid the moral censure applied to homosexual practice. These playwrights began with existing tropes of female homoeroticism and eventually developed a variety of narrative strategies to evoke the pleasure of female homoerotic desire.

CHAPTER 1



THE EIDOLIC LESBIAN IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND

Female homoerotic desire and same-sex sexual activity may have existed on the margins of the dominant culture, but they were recognizable in late-sixteenth-century England. The woman-loving woman was an eidolon, a phantom, and an ideal with an imaginary, illusory presence. She was a figure rarely defined but many writers described her desire and behaviors or used those desires and behaviors to complicate their plots. Various types of documents—literary, religious, and legal—provided both subtle and explicit references to women who actively engaged in erotic and sexual encounters with other women. These documents, which support a cognizance of female homoeroticism in early modern England, carry various responses to the desire between and within each account of erotic activity. Bruce Smith, in *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare's England*, distinguishes male homoerotic desire readily represented in poetic discourse from male homosexual acts legislated against by moral, medical, and legal discourse. A similar distinction can be detected in portrayals of female homoerotic desire and sexual acts.¹ This chapter explores nondramatic textual evidence of female homoeroticism in circulation during the sixteenth century and available to both English playwrights and spectators. The chapter also investigates representations of female cross-dressing and argues that scenarios of homoeroticism were not an inherent outcome of female-to-male disguise narratives. Rather, chapter 2 argues, playwrights consciously constructed homoerotic scenarios using the convention of the disguised heroine.

I FEMALE HOMOEROTICISM IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND

Unlike most fictional representations, which present female homoerotic desire and treat it sympathetically or ambiguously, references in non-fiction focus on sexual relations between women and denounce their behavior. Secular legislation in Europe that condemns female–female sexual practices follows ancient and medieval theological judgments, like St. Paul’s epistle to the Romans (1:26–27). Early church leaders such as St. Ambrose, St. John Chrysostom, St. Anselm of Canterbury, and Peter Abelard interpreted Paul’s statement against women who “exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural” as a reference to women who desired other women sexually.² The medieval church even prescribed absolution for female–female sexual transgressions. Pierre Payer identifies fourteen different manuals for catholic confessors that censure female same-sex behavior, including the widely influential penitentials of Egbert of York, the Venerable Bede, and Theodore of Canterbury (“If a woman practices vice with a woman, she shall do penance for three years”).³ At least five theological collections from the tenth through the twelfth century, including the *Decretum* of Burchard, contain prohibitions against female–female sexual activity and such restrictions continued in confessional manuals and penitentials through the fifteenth and late-sixteenth century.⁴ The most influential theological work to reference female homosexual activity was St. Thomas Aquinas’s *Summa Theologica* (written 1267–73). The four activities he defines as “unnatural vice” include “copulation with an undue sex, male with male, or female with female,” and he refers to Romans 1:27.⁵ The theological treatises cited here identify a conscious religious discourse that condemned female homosexual experience as immoral, a discourse that despite its Catholic origin would have surely remained, even vestigially, in Protestant England. In fact, in *The Stripping of the Altars* Eamon Duffy argues that Catholicism was a vibrant, vital aspect of English life “up to the very moment of Reformation” and that the new religion preserved and continued many Catholic practices and beliefs.⁶

Theological evidence points to a broader awareness of female homoeroticism. In *Immodest Acts*, Judith C. Brown argues that though female–female sexual activity may have been ignored, especially by the courts, “at some level of knowledge, people were well aware that it existed.”⁷ From her study of early modern theological and secular laws, Brown concludes that European society simply did not take sexual acts between women very seriously for several

reasons.⁸ First, as an adolescent initiation to sexual practice it provided a male partner with an experienced lover and such early experimentation posed no obstacle to male sexual privilege. Second, a woman who engaged in same-sex sexual activity elevated her inferior gender position by emulating a male sexual role. Finally, female–female sex provided no threat to procreation since the ability to procreate was thought to exist only in male semen. Louis Crompton argues conversely that secular and religious authorities found female–female sex as equally abhorrent as male homosexuality and punished it just as severely.⁹ Brown and Crompton may disagree about the severity of legislation and popular sentiment against female same-sex sexual activity, but both make strong cases that early modern cultures recognized its existence.¹⁰ They identify prohibitions against female–female sexual acts in the early modern secular laws of France, Italy, Spain, Russia, Germany, Switzerland, and Charles V's constitution for the Holy Roman Empire.¹¹ The presence of laws throughout the continent supports Brown's statement that, on some level, society was aware of sexual activity between women. To presume the English had no knowledge of such juridical precedents is implausible.

To explain the light volume of court cases against female homosexual practices, Brown and Lillian Faderman argue that only women who cross-dressed and engaged in sexual relations with other women were severely punished by the courts in early modern Europe.¹² Society may have thought that female–female sexual activity was sinful and illegal, but cross-dressing and the use of an artificial phallus exacerbated the crime and increased the subsequent punishment.¹³ Brown theorizes that, in dressing like men, women disrupted the social order resting on the binary opposition of gender: their disruption of male hegemony was far more threatening than their sexual activity. European cases of female–female sex involving transvestite disguise record harsh legal ramifications for cross-dressed women who enjoyed sexual relations with other women. For example, both Henri Estienne in his 1566 *Apologie pour Hérodote* and Michel de Montaigne in his 1580–81 *Journal de voyage* provide accounts of transvestite women whose corporal punishments, being burned alive and hung, were associated with the use of an artificial phallus. Estienne writes about a young woman who dressed as a man, found work in a vineyard, and was married for two years. When local officials discovered “the wickedness from which she counterfeited the duty of marriage,” she was imprisoned, made to confess, and executed.¹⁴ The story appears in a chapter along with other tales involving sodomy and bestiality, all of which Estienne considered sins against nature. In

a similar account, Montaigne tells of a girl who, along with seven or eight others, decided to dress and live as a man. She became a popular weaver in her village. When an early engagement fell through, she settled in Montirandet, Italy, fell in love with a woman, and married her. After six months, a traveler from her hometown discovered her and she was tried and hanged “on the charge of using unlawful appliances to remedy the defects of her sex.”¹⁵

The absence of an “appliance” or cross-dressing might have spared the women in these two stories. In both Estienne’s and Montaigne’s accounts, the courts did not execute the cross-dressed woman’s partner, who presumably displayed traditional female traits. The courts might have tolerated a woman who appeared conventionally feminine or whose sexual activity did not include an artificial phallus. Authorities criminalized female–female sexual activity only when it usurped the social order of gender, either by transvestism or by the use of a sexual device.¹⁶ For example, Europeans also write with obvious pleasure and interest about the “exotic” same-sex behaviors they encounter among traditionally feminine women abroad. Nicolas de Nicolay’s travel narrative *Navigations into Turkie*, available in a 1585 English translation, presents an erotic but not recusant picture of Turkish women at the baths. Some of these women:

become so fervently in love the one of the other as if it were with men, in such sort that perceiving some maiden or woman of excellent beauty they will not cease until they have found means to bath with them, & to handle & grope them every where at their pleasures so ful they are of luxuriousnes & feminine wantonnes: Even as in times past wer the Tribades, of the number wherof was Sapho the Lesbian.¹⁷

Nicolay remarks that this “lascivious voluptuousness” is one of several reasons the baths are so obviously popular with Turkish women. Of course, Nicolay’s description is complicated because it fits into a European stereotype of Near Eastern exoticism—while he does not incriminate female homoeroticism as illegal, he does paint it as alluringly deviant. Still, like Brantôme, Nicolay associates the female–female sexual activity he witnessed in Turkey with transhistorical and transnational practices, suggesting a broad cultural awareness.

Despite the existence of theological and secular precedents, English law did not condemn female homosexual activity. Although a 1533 statute mandated a death sentence for male homosexual activity, the English courts did not link female same-sex practices with male homosexuality and never interpreted the statute to include women.¹⁸

Nonetheless, a curious statement by John Bridges, the dean of Sarum, suggests that female homosexuality did not go unnoticed in Elizabethan England. His *Defence of the Government Established in the church of Englande for Ecclesiasticall Matters*. . . , printed in 1587, justifies Elizabeth I's monarchy by arguing that many women have exercised exemplary government. However, among his exhaustive descriptions of flawless female rulers, Bridges includes this description of the Amazons:

Danaeus his next example is of the Amazonas. Which, sith I accord also, that it was an ill state of government, in murdring, and expelling of men from the whole affaires of the commonweale, and from living among them: though I take it not to be altogether fabulous, but that there were in deede such Women, and had such government: I therefore passe it over. . . . Howbeit, this we may say, that if they had not so misused themselves, but given that honour unto the Man, which by the Lawe of God and nature, is due unto the dignity of his sexe: and in the societie of Matrimony, had not violated the mans prerogative. Then, if the right of governing those regions had fallen to a Woman, I see not why it had not been as lawful here, as in Ethiopia, Sabea, Iurie, or in any other kingdomes above specified.¹⁹

Female rule is not at issue here. The rest of the text argues in favor of female monarchy. The Amazons failed not because they usurped male political authority—women have as much right to rule as men—but because they “violated the mans prerogative” in regard to “the societie of Matrimony”—they “misused” themselves. While the Amazons had a legal right to exercise political control without men, Bridges argues that they had no right to exercise sexual control without males. He condemns the Amazons because they expelled men from their society and transgressed sexual traditions by replacing male/female unions with female/female ones.

Other noted writers in England, as Valerie Traub has shown, refer to sexual actions between women.²⁰ Both Erasmus and the evangelical London preacher John Bale identify female homosexual relations as a malady of Catholicism. Rules of celibacy, according to Erasmus and Bale, have caused rampant hypocrisy within religious communities as men and women ostensibly devoted to chastity relieve their sexual frustrations in all manner of indecent acts. The tempered but still troubling critique of Erasmus appears in his colloquy *The Girl with No Interest in Marriage* (*Virgo Misogamos*), first printed in 1523. Erasmus believed that only rare individuals had a true spiritual calling to celibacy and therefore in his dialogue between Eubulus and the

naive Catherine he advocates Christian marriage over religious vocation, partly because “not everything’s virginal among those virgins.” In the convent, Catherine will find “more who copy Sappho’s behavior than share her talent,” which is an allusion Erasmus either finds too shocking or too obvious—or both—to explain.²¹ The radical Bale leveled a more virulent attack against Catholicism in the preface to the second part of *The Actes of a Chast Example of the Englysh Votaryes*. “Undre the professyon of chastyte,” according to Bale, men and women engage in “a preposterus *amor*” and burn “in their owne lustes one to another, that man wyth man, that is to saye, monke wyth monke, nonne with nonne, fryre with fryre, & prest with prest, wrought fylthynesse.”²² Bale, who seeks deliverance from “the monstrouse generation” of Roman Catholicism, takes his censorious language from St. Paul and equates homosexual practice with degeneracy. Both Bale and Erasmus believe that women confined in convents, like those of Aretino’s imagination, will find sexual fulfillment with each other.

By the beginning of the seventeenth century, English writers could rely on an advanced vocabulary of terms to identify and denigrate sexual relations between women. As Nicolay’s quotation above demonstrates, the word “tribade,” as a reference to a woman who engages in sexual actions with another woman, was present in England before the end of the sixteenth century.²³ By 1601 Ben Jonson could use it suggestively in his poem “The Forrest,” dismissing Venus and the three Graces—her “Tribade trine”—as unworthy muses for his poetry.²⁴ In the virulent “Epigram to the Court Pucell,” Jonson uses tribade as a satiric metaphor to describe a woman’s lack of creative literary productivity: “What though with Tribade lust she force a Muse, / And in an Epicæne fury can write newes.”²⁵ The lines conflate tribadism with aggressive sexuality and male performance which Jonson uses to mock women who attempt to write, something he clearly considers a male activity. Jonson’s vocabulary also extended to the term “fricatrice,” although his intended meaning is unclear. In *Volpone* (1606), Lady Politic Would-be, taking Peregrine for a female prostitute in male dress, calls him first a eunuch (with a specific male homosexual inference), then a hermaphrodite, and finally “a lewd harlot, a base fricatrice, / a female devil in a male outside” (4.2.48–56).²⁶ Here “fricatrice” may refer to lewd women in general or, more specifically, to women who derive sexual pleasure by rubbing their genitalia against other women, with the implication that such women also cross-dressed. Jonson is not the only playwright familiar with these terms. In the manuscript of William Percy’s play *The Cuck-Queanes*

and Cuckolds Errants; or, the Bearing Down the Inne (1601), Pearle, a doctor of civil law, berates his wife for losing a silver bowl. Among the epithets he hurls at her is “tribade,” which has sexual and pejorative connotations in the context of his list: “Hore, Hare, Harlot, Bitch, Fellatrice, Witch, Bawde, Ribaud, Tribade.”²⁷

The above material refers to sexual acts between women and almost uniformly condemns female–female sexual practices. As the examples from Jonson and Percy demonstrate, even fictional literature presented pejorative references about female–female sexual activity. If early modern English authors needed a model for this kind of derisive representation in literature, they could find examples in Greek and Roman texts just as Brantôme had. Fascination with classical materials brought early modern intellectuals, scholars, and writers into contact with Greek and Roman writers such as Plautus, Ovid, Seneca the Elder, Martial, Juvenal, Pseudo-Lucian, and Lucian, all of whom discussed or represented love or sexual relations between women, some of them explicitly.²⁸ For example, epigram sixty-seven in Martial’s seventh book of epigrams describes “Lesbian Philaenis,” who when “she gets down to sex, she does not suck men (she thinks that not virile enough), but absolutely devours girls’ middles.”²⁹ The epigram concludes, “May the gods give you your present mind, Philaenis, who think it virile to lick a cunt.”

However, dramatic literature in early modern England rarely represents sexual acts between women and instead follows representations of homoerotic desire in other contemporary fictional literature. Most of the ensuing examples imply a female homoerotic but have no language for the desire or behavior they describe. The absence of sexual activity between women in fictional literature also corresponds to a decrease of moral censure by the writers. Generally, the texts that do treat female same-sex desire as uncommon or unusual strike a tone of pity rather than disapproval. Even those fictional texts that employ the figure of the cross-dressed woman to frame female homoerotic desire are not marked by the degree of animosity leveled at female homosexual behavior.

While the writings of classical authors such as Martial, Juvenal, and Lucian were available only to readers of Greek or Latin, the homoerotically charged texts of Ovid were readily available in English translations. One of Ovid’s *Heroycall Epistles* tells the story of Sappho and Phaon on which much succeeding information about the Greek poet was based. First translated in English in 1567, the work was very popular and later editions appeared in 1569, 1570, and 1584. While the epistle revolves around Sappho’s unrequited heterosexual love for

Phaon, it also remarks on her estrangement from the women she loves: "Lesbian Lasses eke / are now forgotten quite. / Not Amythion I force, / nor Cydno passing fine: / Nor Atthis, as she did of yore, / allures these eyes of mine. / Nor yet a hundred more / whom (shame ylaide aside) / I fancied erste: thou all that love / from them to thee hast wride."³⁰ Ovid likens Sappho's sexual passion for the boatman Phaon to the desire she once felt for other women. The epistle is especially provocative because it identifies Sappho's love for women as the cause of her slandered reputation: "Ye Lesbian Lasses all / that border on the Lake: / And ye that of the Aeolian towne / your names are thought to take, / Ye Lesbian Lasses (that / for cause I loved you sore / Breede my defame) unto my Harpe / I charge you come no more."³¹ Sappho's deep love of the "Lesbian Lasses" brought about her "defame." She acknowledges that her love for women carried the stigma of impropriety. While Ovid lacked sexual explicitness, a 1583 Latin edition of the *Heroycall Epistles* printed in London described Sappho's sexual relations with women in graphic terms. Guido Morillonus headed the translation of "Sappho to Phaon" written by Andreas Naugerius with the following: "Sappho did not love only men with such abandon, but she was also the tribade of other women; that is, she jumped on top of them and rubbed herself against them."³² This explanation demonstrates that even when homoerotic representations such as Ovid's narrative lacked explicit sexual content they still existed within the context of sexual practice.

Ovid's story of Iphis and Ianthe from the *Metamorphosis*, translated into English in 1567, is also homoerotically charged. An even more popular text, it was reissued in 1575, 1584, 1587, and 1593. Henry Bellamy adapted and dramatized Ovid's story at Cambridge in 1621 in the Latin play *Iphis* and John Lyly used it as a source for *Gallathea*.³³ The story relates how her mother raised Iphis as a boy to protect her from a father homicidally conscious of a daughter's economic strain on a family. Once grown, her father intends that the disguised Iphis marry the lovely Ianthe. Iphis, far from appalled at this course of events, finds Ianthe erotically attractive: "Iphys loves whereof shee thinkes shee may not bee / Partaker, and the selfe same thing augumenteth still her flame. / Herself a Mayden with a Mayd (ryght straunge) in love became. / Shee scarce could stay her teares. What end remaynes for mee (or thee) / How straunge a love; how uncoth; how prodigious reynes in mee" (sig. 122r).³⁴ Iphis may find her love unnatural, but nothing lessens her attraction. Her lengthy lament over what she thinks is a hopeless love drips with

sensual desire:

Hope is the thing that breedes desyre, hope feedes the amorous
thought.

This hope thy sex denieth thee. Not watching doth restreine
Thee from embracing of the thing wherof thou art so fayne.
Nor yit the Husbands jealousie, nor rowghnesse of her Syre,
Nor yit the coynesse of the Wench dooth hinder thy desyre.
And yit thou canst not her enjoy . . .

Behold the blisfull tyme,

The day of Marriage is at hand. Ianthee shall be myne,
And yit I shall not her enjoy. Amid the water wee
Shall thirst. (sig. 122r-v)

The text positions Iphis as a sympathetic heroine and focuses attention on her homoerotic passion. Despite the gender transformation that brings the story to a heterosexual conclusion, the predominant image of the narrative shows two female characters in sexual union—the “lesbian scene” amid episodes of various sexual fantasies.

The existence of Ovid’s compassionate homoerotic portrayal notwithstanding, few early modern texts present as vigorously approving an image of female homoerotic desire as John Donne’s 1590 heroical epistle, “Sappho to Philaenis.” Donne’s poem is important because it demonstrates the range of attitudes English writers had toward female homoeroticism. Donne locates Sappho in a post-Ovidian history where, instead of throwing herself from the cliffs of Leucas, she renounces Phao for the Leucadian poetess Philaenis: “Such was my Phao ‘awhile, but shalbe never / As thou wast, art, and, oh, maist thou bee ever!”³⁵ Janel Mueller writes that Donne “goes to lengths unparalleled in his time to personify the lesbian love of his Sappho as both sexually active, and emotionally and morally positive.”³⁶ In fact, “Sappho to Philaenis” argues not simply that female sexual unions are acceptable, but that they are superior to heterosexual matches. Men are “harsh” and “rough” during intercourse—Donne uses disparaging agricultural metaphors to describe male sexual behaviors—and reproduction complicates heterosexual affairs and ruins the bodily perfection of women (l. 38). However, similarities between women, both emotional and physical, “sweeten” their sexual coition. This highly erotic poem is unusual for articulating sexual fulfillment between women when most fictional literature does not present physical expressions and constructs characters unable to conceive such a possibility. Describing the masturbatory fantasy Philaenis provokes

in Sappho, Donne shapes an explicit desire:

My two lipps, eyes, thighes differ from thy two,
 But so as thine from one another doe:
 And, oh, no more; the likenes beinge such,
 Why should they not alike in all parts touch?
 Hand to strange hand, lipp to lipp none denies;
 Why should they breast to breast or thighes to thighes?
 Likeness begettis such strange selfe-flatterie,
 That touching my selfe, all seemes done to thee. (ll. 45–52)

“Sappho to Philaenis” represents an exception to early modern male-authored texts that ignore female homoerotic desire, ridicule it, or construct it as transgressive. Donne’s Sappho, declaring hers a “naturall” desire, delights in the sensual, sexual embodiment of her love—hands touch, lips meet, breasts press against each other and thighs entwine in mutual satisfaction.

Literary texts rarely present female homoeroticism with as much candor as Donne used in his poem. Instead, fictional plots suggest homoerotic desires within the context of heterosexual plots that revolve around mistaken identity. Male or female characters may dress as the opposite sex in narratives in which young women then either mistakenly believe they have fallen in love with a woman, or actually fall in love with a woman whom they mistake for a man. In either case, a female homoerotic tension exists within the text alongside the heterosexual narrative. Instances of such constructs abound in early modern literature. For example, Book 2, chapter 11, of William Warner’s *Albions England*, published in 1586 with editions through 1612 and adapted by Heywood in *The Golden Age*, recounts the story of Callisto and Jupiter and represents sexual activity between women. When Jupiter, disguised as a nymph to enter Diana’s woods, approaches Callisto, he takes great physical liberties before revealing his identity:

He Nymph-like sits him by the Nymph, that tooke him for no man:
 And after smiles, with neerer signes of Loves assault began.
 He feeleth oft her Ivorie breasts, nor maketh coy to kisse:
 Yeat all was wel, a Maiden to a Maiden might doe this.
 Than picks he up her tucked Frocke, nor did Calisto blush,
 Or thinke abuse: he tickles too, no blab she thinks the Bush.
 Thus whilst she thinkes her Sister Nunne to be a merrie Lasse,
 The Wanton did disclose himselfe, and told her who he was.

Away the Virgin would have fled, whom he withheld by force:
 She would not love, he could not leave: she wrangleth, and he wooeth:
 She did resist, he did persist, and sport denied dooeth.³⁷

The verse frankly admits that Diana's nymphs regularly kiss and fondle each other, perhaps kissing each other's breasts and exploring one another's genitalia. The nature of physical activity that Callisto deems appropriate between women is highly sexual. The description also implies that while Callisto might enjoy the explorations of another nymph, she cannot abide the physical advances of a male, although Warner is unclear whether she prefers women sexually or is afraid of becoming pregnant.

Sir Philip Sidney's 1590 *Arcadia* presents another account of homoerotic desire accomplished through male cross-dressing. In Book 2, Philoclea falls in love with the Amazon Zelmane, actually the knight Pyrocles in disguise, thinking he is a woman, which establishes a homoerotic paradigm. When she realizes the sexual nature of her attraction, Philoclea becomes anguished because she believes there is no way to satisfy such a love: " 'O me, unfortunate wretch,' said she, 'what poisonous heats be these . . . ? It is the impossibility that doth torment me; for unlawful desires are punished after the effect of enjoying, but impossible desires are punished in the desire itself' " However, after these anxious musings Philoclea considers the possibility that Zelmane may return her passion and, if so, resolves to celebrate their love: "And yet, alas, why do I thus condemn my fortune before I hear what she can say for herself . . . ? And if she can love poor me, Shall I think scorn to love such a woman as Zelmane . . . ? Thou lovest me, excellent Zelmane, and I love thee!"³⁸ Philoclea's determination transcends the "impossible desires" she mentioned, suggesting that she fears not the impossibility of sexual fulfillment between women, but only that Zelmane will not—rather than cannot—return her affection.³⁹ The question of sexuality and sexual desire is further confused in the *Arcadia* because both Philoclea's parents are attracted to the supposed Amazon: her father thinks Zelmane is a woman, and her mother knows Zelmane is a disguised man. Gender performance confuses sexual desire and allows the reader to move among female homoerotic, male homoerotic, and heterosexual desire.⁴⁰

Another narrative involving male disguise exists in *The Troublesome and Hard Adventures in Love* printed in 1594. The noble lovers, Duchess Brisil and Prince Periander, escape Periander's captivity in Spain by disguising themselves as two country maids. They buy a flock

of sheep and pretend to be sister shepherdesses. However, after glimpsing Brisil in a compromising situation with a shepherd, Periander writes her a farewell letter, which another jealous shepherdess reads. In telling his story, Periander remarks that the shepherdess “could not but marvell at the strangenesse of the case; for she perceived thereby what kinde of sisters we were.”⁴¹ Periander continues to describe himself and Brisil as “strange sisters” throughout the narrative, as the author humorously traffics in both the homoerotic and incestuous connotations of such a relationship. The humor arises out of the comic irony that a heterosexual relationship is mistaken for an incestuously homosexual one.

Albions England, the *Arcadia*, and *Adventures in Love* all construct homoerotic scenarios using male characters cross-dressed as women. A similar phenomenon occurs when female characters dress like men. The story of Ide and Olive from the French romance *Huon of Bordeaux*, similar to Sidney’s *Arcadia*, presents female characters that accept same-sex attractions. The work appeared in an English translation by 1534 and was reprinted twice by 1601. A section of the epic relates the adventures of Ide, Huon’s granddaughter, who disguises as a knight to escape the incestuous advances of her father, leaves home, and eventually marries Olive, daughter of the Holy Roman Emperor.⁴² Ide’s inherent military talent and political poise attract the Emperor while her “bountie and sweetnesse” attract Olive (sig. Qq7).⁴³ According to the narrative, Ide and Olive are physically intimate, spending their wedding night “clipping [embracing] and kissing” (sig. Qq7). Ide does not shrink from physical contact with Olive, although she limits their activity to kissing, fearful that if anyone discovers her sexual identity she will face serious consequences. However, when their intimacy proves unfulfilling for Olive, Ide reveals herself and in a surprising narrative turn Olive agrees to keep Ide’s secret:

My right sweete Louer, discomfort not your selfe, for you shall not be accused by me neither to no man nor woman living, we are wedded together, I will be good and true to you, since you haue kept your selfe so truely, with you I will use my time, & passe my destiny since it is thus, for I see well that it is the pleasure of our Lord God. (sig. Qq7v)

The author overcomes the sexual ambiguities created by cross-dressing with Ide’s revelation and heightens the homoerotic reading of the text through Ide’s acceptance of a same-sex partner. The two heroines agree to settle into a companionate marriage, which discloses a deep

mutual affection between them. However, when the Emperor discovers that his daughter has accepted this female union, he decrees that both Ide and his daughter be burned alive. Diane Watt has argued that the Emperor's response indicates a surprising awareness of female homoerotic desire and cultural reactions to it in a literary representation.⁴⁴ Ide only escapes death because an Iphis-like metamorphosis transforms her into a man.

The twenty-fifth book of Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, translated by John Harrington in 1591, tells of another cross-dressed heroine, Bradamant, an Amazon-like warrior who becomes the object of the Princess Fiordispina's desire. After the princess kisses Bradamant, that martial maid thinks, "Tis better to be knowne a Ladie gentle" than to be thought an unmanly man, and she tells Fiordispina that she is a woman (25.24.7).⁴⁵ The princess questions the propriety of loving another woman, but still resolves to take Bradamant home. The young warrior agrees and once there Fiordispina dresses Bradamant in women's clothes in the hope that seeing her in female attire will end her attraction. It does not, and like Iphis and Philoclea, she laments her state:

Ah woe is me (she said) that I alone
Should live in such dispaire to be relieved.
In passed times I thinke there hath beene none, . . .
That love should make by such a strong infection
One woman beare another such affection. (25.28.3–7)

At this point in the story, Fiordispina's desire is more clearly homoerotic than it was before—she is attracted to a person dressed as a woman who she knows is female. Gender confusion is at play when Bradamant is dressed like a man, although Fiordispina knows she is female, because the sensory information of the male attire makes Bradamant's sex ambiguous. In an attempt to clarify sex through appropriate gender performance, Fiordispina assumes that desire rests on a heterosexual paradigm and that her desire for Bradamant will end when she sees her dressed in feminine apparel. However, her desire only grows and she spends a sleepless night lying at Bradamant's side.

Apparel is also the crux in Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*. The martial Britomart attracts the lustful Malecasta, who thinks the warrior is a man and steals into Britomart's bed. Lauren Silberman compares the homoerotics of Spenser's narrative with his source material from Ariosto and concludes that while Spenser suppressed the homoerotic potential that Ariosto exploited between Bradamant

and Fiordispina, Britomart's gender deception makes Spenser's scene morally ambiguous.⁴⁶ Although Britomart knows Malecasta is trying "to woo" her, Britomart entertains the maid with "faire countenance" rather than reveal that she is a woman (3.1.55.5–7).⁴⁷ Britomart therefore puts in place the comic episode that unfolds in her bedchamber and that quickly transforms into a violent confrontation in which she is wounded. The text suggests that homoerotic flirtation jeopardizes social order.

A parallel scene opens Book 4 but with different consequences. After saving Amoret from the sorcerer Busirane, Britomart plans to reunite her with the knight Scudamour. As the two travel together Amoret grows wary of her companion, whom "she surely thought / To be a man" (4.1.8.1–2). Preserving her sexual virtue conflicts with the "service"—including sexual favors—Amoret owes Britomart for saving her life. Amoret becomes even more anxious when Britomart begins talking about "loue" and "lustfulness" (4.1.7.8 and 4.1.8.5). After deliberately deceiving and flirting with Amoret, Britomart reveals her true sex. Instead of resolving the sexual tension, Britomart's revelation seems to increase it as the two enjoy what scholars interpret as an amorous night when Amoret joins Britomart in bed:⁴⁸

And eke fayre Amoret now freed from feare,
More franke affection did to her afford,
And to her bed, which she was wont forbear,
Now freely drew, and found right safe assurance there
Where all the night they of their loues did treat,
And hard aduentures twixt themselues alone,
That each the other gan with passion great,
And griefull pittie priuately bemone. (4.1.15.6–16.4)

The sexual energy displayed in stanza 16 ("And hard aduentures twixt themselues alone, / That each the other gan with passion great") undercuts the female purity implied in stanza 15. The erotic ambiguity of the "hard aduentures twixt themselues alone" titillates the reader with its suggestion that the women both feel heterosexual longing and engage in homosexual practice to assuage those desires. Although Britomart flirted with Malecasta, she found the woman "too light" (3.1.55.7) and rejected erotic contact with her. Amoret proves a more appealing companion to whom Britomart discloses her sex and with whom she enters a sexually charged relationship. Disguise and revelation in tandem construct various levels of homoerotic contact.⁴⁹

Even the suggestion of cross-dressing advanced a homoerotic construct. Jorge de Montemayor's romantic narrative *Diana*, translated by Bartholomew Yong and printed in English in 1598, provides two cross-dressing narratives of female homoerotic desire: one uses a conventional female disguise, the other employs the motif in an unusual manner. The first disguise plot tells the story of Felismena, which resembles *Twelfth Night* and apparently served as a source for the *Two Gentlemen of Verona*.⁵⁰ In the episode, the martial Filesmena tells of loving Don Felix, becoming his page, and going as a messenger to his new lover Celia.⁵¹ Of course, Celia falls instantly in love with Filesmena, who encourages the attraction to keep Don Felix and Celia apart. Filesmena recounts how her plan ultimately fails and describes her attempts to pacify Celia's grief over her unrequited love: "For in the greatest haste in the worlde she got her into her chamber, where locking the dore after her, it availed me not to call and crie unto her, requesting her with amorous and sweete words to open me the dore, and to take such satisfaction on me, as it pleased her" (sig. F4).⁵² The homoerotic subtext threatens to become more than subtext when Filesmena offers herself to Celia as a sexual partner. Before she can accept, however, Celia dies of grief. Filesmena's anguish at having caused Celia's death metamorphoses into anguish over losing Don Felix, who, in his own grief, steals away. In *Diana*, as in so many early modern narratives, a heterosexual conclusion prevents the fulfillment of homoerotic promise.

The second homoerotic narrative in *Diana* is the story of Selvagia, which presents a unique use of the cross-dressing motif. The story begins when Selvagia, taking part in a female vigil in the temple of Minerva, sits next to a veiled shepherdess. The unknown woman, later identified as Ismenia, stares shyly at Selvagia, who falls in love "being suddenly enamoured of those faire eies" (sig. B3v). Ismenia takes Selvagia's hand and "with a sweete and amorous eie a little while" beholds her, "whereupon being now so stricken in love, as toong cannot exprese," Selvagia promises to be the woman's loving servant (sig. B3v). Ismenia returns the sentiment, and the two spend the vigil in "mutuall imbracings" uttering "loving speeches" (sig. B3v). However, Ismenia deceives Selvagia. First, she tells Selvagia that she is really a man who dressed in female attire in order to spend the night in the temple. As it turns out, though, Ismenia is cruelly facetious. She is certainly not a man, nor does she love Selvagia. The story becomes even more complicated with the appearance of two male suitors, one of whom is Ismenia's identical cousin. Each of the four pursues someone else in the quartet who does not reciprocate his or her affection.

The Selvagia narrative is unique on two levels. First, is its unusual use of the cross-dressing convention. Ismenia pretends to be a cross-dressed man only to entangle Selvagia in her erotic intrigue. This cool seduction has no other motivation than diversion—Selvagia is the victim of Ismenia's "fonde pranks" (sig. B5). Ismenia ensnares Selvagia in an erotic tryst for her own amusement. Second, the narrative offers a rare glimpse of female homoerotic bonding and reactions to homoerotic attraction. Montemayor presents the initial encounter between Selvagia and Ismenia as an erotic encounter between two women before suggesting the possibility of disguise, and the dialogue indicates the women's concerns about the propriety of their relationship. Ismenia knows she has "boldly presumed" to take Selvagia's hand and gaze on her, but is hopeful that Selvagia will not be "offended" by her actions (sig. B3v). Selvagia falls in love with Ismenia's "faire eies," but wonders: "How can it be, gentle Shepherdesse, that thy selfe being so passing faire, shouldest fal in love with her, who wants it so much, . . . with a woman as I am" (sig. B3v). The line, which is unclear or purposely ambiguous, implies both the presumption of physical inadequacy and the fear of moral impropriety. Ismenia argues in response that the two are destined to love one another: "It is that love (faire Shepherdesse) saide she againe, that seldome endes, surviving all destinies, and which is neither subject to change of time, nor fortune" (sig. B3v).⁵³ Ismenia wins Selvagia's love, long before she pretends to be a cross-dressed man.

Female homoerotic desire is explicitly constructed or subtly represented in a wide range of texts published or available in the sixteenth century—Greek and Latin writing, theological texts, continental secular laws, travel narratives, manuscript poetry, and various fictional works. These narratives signify an extant knowledge of female homoerotic passion and sexual activity in the last decades of sixteenth-century England, perhaps not available to all citizens, but certainly within the sphere of the educated classes. The evidence also displays an incongruity in which sources of nonfiction vilify homosexual practice while literary texts present benign or sympathetic constructs of homoerotic desire. That is, works of nonfiction, which are more likely to describe female–female sexual acts, condemn such practices, while fictional literature, more likely to represent homoerotic desire than sexual practice, is far less proscriptive. Like other fictional genres, dramatic literature generally evokes homoerotic tension without describing physical, sexual activity. Play scripts in particular, as chapters 2 and 3 chapters reveal, tend to embed homoerotic tension in the gender ambiguity of cross-dressed female characters. The homoerotic constructions

that appear in dramatic literature in early modern England draw upon and add to the varied cultural understandings of female homoeroticism.

II FEMALE CROSS-DRESSING AND THE DISGUISED HEROINE

While the cross-dressed heroine might be an effective device to construct homoerotic desires within literature, not all literary representations associated cross-dressed female characters with homoerotic desire. In fact, the cross-dressed female character had various significations, from valorous heroine to comic ingenue, and therefore, if dramatic texts exhibited female homoeroticism, playwrights deliberately encoded that desire in their scripts. The cross-dressed female character in early modern drama was not an aberration, nor was she merely a convention of the boy player; rather she was an active figure in fictional and nonfictional narratives of early modern England. A look at assumptions surrounding sex and gender in sixteenth-century England and an examination of various nonhomoerotic representations of cross-dressed women in early modern London and in English fiction explain the complex and malleable nature of the cross-dressed heroine. Controversies regarding female biology and the position of women in society encouraged the development of a dichotomous gender system and evoked a fervent defense of female autonomy. Cross-dressing became an emblem in the dispute and was alternately condemned and celebrated.

During the early modern period, the idea of “woman” was debated in many disciplines.⁵⁴ The fact that so many differing views existed about what and who a woman was indicates the instability of gender.⁵⁵ Even biological sex was variable in the sense that the sexual identity of woman was not clearly defined. Ian Maclean, in *The Renaissance Notion of Woman*, explains that some early modern doctors and philosophers, following Aristotelian theories and medieval commentaries, considered women partially unformed men because their genitals had not developed outside their bodies.⁵⁶ Others believed women possessed semen, and certain medieval medical theories held that female ovaries were internal testes. They conjectured that a sexually frustrated woman could generate enough heat to make her inverted male genitalia appear outside her body. Based on the notion of woman as a deformed or imperfect man, Thomas Laqueur argues in *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*, that early modern Europe had a one-sex system.⁵⁷ The inability of physicians and anatomists to define woman on her own terms suggests a conflation

of female and male sex characteristics, which would allow a great deal of ambiguity in gender. Gender distinctions existed or were imposed to define and separate a fluid notion of sex and gender.⁵⁸ Whether defined as an imperfect male, or a perfect (although inferior) sex, woman was carefully constructed as different from, and usually subordinate to, man. This difference between woman and man was based primarily on biological sex determinants. The identification of gender was accomplished, as Laqueur states, by social contracts—primarily through prescriptive codes of dress. That is, a body displaying a penis, being called male, was expected to wear certain kinds of clothes and manifest certain behaviors, and a body without a penis was expected to wear certain clothes different from a male's and to act in certain ways identifiably different from male behavior.

Not surprisingly, then, writers carried on a formal debate, waged through a pamphlet war roughly between 1540 and 1620, about the nature of woman.⁵⁹ Various literary tracts defended female authority and autonomy against misogynistic attacks of female inferiority and dependence. Linda Woodbridge argues that paradox—the essence of Renaissance thought—characterized the debate. She maintains that while the age celebrated strong, assertive women in various literary constructs, it also attempted to order and control the behavior of real-life women. The formal controversy, Woodbridge concludes, appealed to writers as a literary conceit, a defense of the “fair sex against hypothetical slanders,” and that these same writers would have never imagined practical applications of their arguments.⁶⁰ Woodbridge notwithstanding, contemporary essays identified gender as a social construct rather than biological destiny and agitated for cultural reform. For an example of the defensive strategy in the debate, consider the *De Nobilitate et Praecellentia Foeminei Sexus* of Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim, written in 1509 but translated into English in 1542.⁶¹ Agrippa questions the early modern presumptions that sustained gender distinctions and concludes that women's behavior and place in society issue not from any predetermined natural order of sex, but from external cultural forces:

And thus by these lawes, the women being subdewed as it were by force of armes, are constrained to give place to men, and to obeye theyr subdewers, not by no naturall, no divyne necessitie of reason, but by custome, education, fortune, and a certayne tyrannicall occasion. (sig. G1–G1v)⁶²

Agrippa maintains that women are not naturally subservient to men, but that economics, education, and custom have rendered them

subservient. Moreover, Agrippa writes that women are kept idle with domestic duties, and implies that with greater freedom and education, a shift in the gendered behavior women are allowed to perform, they would show their equality or superiority to men. The author of England's most vehement support of women, the *Haec-Vir* pamphlet, echoes Agrippa's defense by declaring that "*Custom* is an Idiot" for having subordinated women in society against all reasonable expectations of their ability.⁶³ In *Renaissance Feminism*, Constance Jordan also claims that gender was more a cultural construct than a biological fact. She argues that early modern Europe was flexible in its acceptance of who performed what gendered behaviors.⁶⁴

By the 1570s, the separation of gender through clothing became a point of contention in the debate in London. At that time some women began wearing attire associated with masculine gender, such as men's beaver hats, ruffs, and doublet-like bodices.⁶⁵ Attacks against female cross-dressing began early in the conflict and became a major issue in the struggle.⁶⁶ For example, William Harrison traveled the country and recorded the following observation in his *Description of England* of 1587: "What should I say of their doublets with pendant codpieces on the breast. . . . I have met with some of these trulls in London so disguised that it hath passed my skill to discern whether they were men or women."⁶⁷ Harrison denigrates female cross-dressing as a sign of immoderate sexual appetite and equates the practice with prostitution.⁶⁸ He goes on to condemn what he feels is a shocking excess in English apparel in general by comparing England licentiously with Sodom and Gomorrah.

Other writings that span a decade in the 1580s provide evidence of the anxiety caused by and hostility directed toward the cross-dressed figure, while the presence of these continuous attacks suggests that the practice enjoyed some popularity. George Gascoigne was one of the first to deride women wearing men's fashions in the epilogue to his 1576 work entitled *The Steele Glas*.

What be they? Women? masking in mens weedes?
 With dutchkin dublets, and with Jerkins jaged?
 With Spanish spangs, and ruffes set out of France
 With high topped hats, and feathers flaunt a flaunt?
 They be so sure even Wo to Men indeed.⁶⁹

Gascoigne lacks the critical bite of Harrison's objection, but nevertheless deplores the "woeful" behavior of female cross-dressing.

Barnabe Riche, in his *Farewell to Military Profession* of 1581 demonstrates that both women and men cross-dressed in early

modern England. In the preface he mentions meeting an effeminately dressed man in the Strand and

began to think it impossible that there might a man be found so foolish as to make himself a scorn to the world to wear so womanish a toy; but rather thought it had been some shameless woman that had disguised herself like a man in our hose and our cloaks—for our doublets, gowns, caps and hats, they had got long ago.⁷⁰

Riche ridicules both sexes for transgressing social expectations of gender performance. “Foolish” men imprudently leave themselves open to contempt or derision and “shameless” women demonstrate their insolence and immorality. The statement also implies that women had been wearing male attire for some time and that Riche regarded the practice as a serious challenge to male authority.

Philip Stubbes, in his 1583 *Anatomie of Abuses*, specifically links cross-dressing on the part of women with a willful determination to usurp male prerogatives, writing:

The women . . . have dublets & Jerkins as men have . . . , & though this be a kind of attire appropriate only to man, yet they blush not to wear it, and if they could as well change their sex, & put on the kind of man, as they can wear apparel assigned only to man, I think they would as verely become men indeed as now they degenerate from godly sober women, in wearing this wanton lewd kind of attire, proper only to man.⁷¹

In this quotation, Stubbes linked the ability to change one’s apparel with the desire to change sex. In other words, women who wore men’s clothes must have also wanted to be men. Further implied in Stubbes’s quotation is the theory that, since they cannot become biological men, by dressing in male attire these women take on male gendered characteristics and privileges. The clothes signal the sex of the individual and the sex of the individual identifies appropriate gender behavior, so wearing masculine apparel gives women license to behave like men and enjoy the rights accorded to men.

Harrison, Gascoigne, Riche, and Stubbes indicate the fallibility of gendered dress codes to identify sexual identity. In early modern London, while clothes signaled appropriate and acceptable gendered behavior they poorly distinguished sexual categories of male and female because the social contract regarding dress was so easily and so often violated. These transgressions had serious consequences. Laura Levine argues that antitheatrical tracts written by men such as

Stubbes, Stephen Gosson, and William Prynne articulate a fear that men playing female roles on stage risk not only effeminization but actual transformation into women. She theorizes that, what drove this anxiety was a deeper fear about the instability of identity.⁷² Following Levine's theory, if women were imperfect or underdeveloped men then masculine apparel brought them one step closer to becoming men indeed. The anxiety of men like Stubbes over the flexibility of sartorial gender coding demonstrates a desire to order and define not only gendered behavior but also sexual identity and construct a dichotomous sex-gender system from one that remained to some extent polymorphous.

Women cross-dressing on the streets of London agitated and confused men such as Harrison, Gascoigne, Riche, and Stubbes, but when the practice appeared in literature it had a different effect—a paradoxical one similar to that described by Woodbridge surrounding the debate about women. Female cross-dressing in the public sphere represented transgressive social behavior while the disguised heroine in literature presented an idyllic fantasy of female “devotion and fidelity,” or so Michael Shapiro argues in his book *Gender in Play on the Shakespearean Stage: Boy Heroines & Female Pages*.⁷³ Having found a small but significant number of legal records that mention female cross-dressing, Shapiro concludes that some women used male disguise “pragmatically” as a way to conceal their identity for a variety of reasons: “Prostitutes seeking customers, maidservants slipping off to meet lovers, women delivering love letters, and others who wished to remain unrecognized for whatever purposes dressed as men in order to move about the city without being detected.”⁷⁴ Given the rhetoric in these legal records, Shapiro argues convincingly that no matter the reason for a woman's cross-dressing, the courts labeled her a prostitute because it found the practice sexually transgressive. Shapiro distinguishes between women who assumed full male disguise and those who employed signs of both genders in their dress. This latter group, primarily involved in the *Hic Mulier / Haec-Vir* controversy of the seventeenth century, used masculine accessories to symbolize their disagreement with socially constructed gender roles. While the women in the *Hic Mulier* controversy were not labeled prostitutes, perhaps owing to their advanced social positions, Shapiro notes that they were still accused of sexually illicit behavior because of their symbolic cross-dressing. In contrast to the anxiety caused by female cross-dressing in the public sphere, Shapiro argues that most dramatic literature takes “a positively sympathetic view of cross-dressing”; that, in fact, playwrights “offer a romantic revision” of publicly held

attitudes toward female cross-dressing. He also argues that dramatic literature celebrates female cross-dressing as a mark of allegiance between women and their husbands or male lovers because they employ the disguise to “forge or resume liaisons with men.”⁷⁵

Jean Howard makes a similar argument in *The Stage and Social Struggle in Early Modern England*. Howard notes that English courts often accused lower class women who cross-dressed of being prostitutes. She maintains that the *Hic Mulier* / *Haec-Vir* controversy proves that women of respectable social rank who wore articles of male clothing transgressed class and gender boundaries and were distressing figures in the social fabric, although the courts did not criminalize their behavior. Still, English society accused all women who appropriated male dress of excessive sexual appetites and being whores. However, this harsh social critique did not necessarily apply to literary constructs. Certainly, women in the comedies who cross-dressed, like Viola and Rosalind, are not figures of voracious sexuality. The literary texts “applaud” these characters, according to Howard, because they do not “aspire to the positions of power assigned men,” and retain “a properly feminine subjectivity.”⁷⁶ By advocating a traditional female subject position, these comedies participate in subordinating women within a strict patriarchal gender system. And yet, Howard argues, the theatre corrupted this “seemingly conservative path” with the cross-dressed character—whose very presence questions gender constructs. According to Howard, theatrical cross-dressing enacted complicated and contradictory positions on gender that reflected “ideological struggles” in society.⁷⁷

Stephen Orgel also maintains that early modern England held inconsistent and contradictory views of female transvestism. He argues, however, that despite attacks against masculine women some portion of English society found female transvestism attractive: “If masculine attire on women had really been found generally repellent, it would not have been stylish.” Orgel notes that England, somewhat “compulsively,” created idealized figures in literature who transgressed the gender boundaries being established.⁷⁸ Branching off from Orgel’s argument, Rachel Trubowitz identifies the “‘exotic’ allure, and repulsion” surrounding female cross-dressing as “symptomatic” of a much broader “boundary panic.” She argues that works like *Hic Mulier* countered the attraction to an insatiable and always available female sexuality manifest in the popularity of female transvestism by denigrating it within a nationalist context and appeals to motherhood.⁷⁹

As a plot device in literature, female cross-dressing, especially the woman turned boy page, never encountered the fear and loathing

directed at cross-dressed women in the public sphere. The literary convention also significantly predates the controversy over women and cross-dressing in England. The disguised heroine, as Valerie Hotchkiss explains, was an extremely popular convention in medieval literature, however, as in sixteenth-century England, not all cross-dressing was viewed the same. Although cross-dressed female characters became exemplary figures in medieval texts owing to the extraordinary heroic deeds they performed, ecclesiastical and secular law considered cross-dressed women subversive social figures.⁸⁰ In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century as well, even though portions of English society reviled cross-dressed women, disguised heroines in literature continued to overcome numerous hardships and displayed a courageous resolve that rendered them sympathetic figures. Congratulated for using disguise to strengthen alliances with men, texts also extol cross-dressed women's ingenious ability to avoid unacceptable male behavior like rape and forced marriage. The disguised heroine was a popular figure in story and song in the second half of sixteenth-century England and appeared within a complex, contradictory cultural context, one that often ignored the homoerotic potential of the convention.

Nowhere is this contradiction more apparent than in Barnabe Riche's *Farewell to Military Profession*. He mocks cross-dressing as a contemporary practice in London in the prefatory epistle discussed earlier; however, he admirably depicts the two disguised heroines in his stories. Consider the character of Silla from "Apolonius and Silla," assumed to be a source for Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*.⁸¹ She is a courageous and honorable woman who affects her disguise, after providentially avoiding a rape, as a means of protection. Dressed as a young page, she woos the lovely widow Julina as a surrogate for the man she secretly loves, Duke Apolonius. Silla reveals her identity only after being accused of impregnating Julina and, upon hearing the dangers that Silla has overcome and the trials she endured on his behalf, Apolonius marries her.⁸² Riche's second story with a cross-dressed female character is "Phylotus and Emelia." Here the plot construct is a minor device, merely allowing the heroine, Emelia, to escape a contracted marriage to a wealthy old man. Riche ridicules the deficiencies of an ancient husband suggesting that avoiding a hoary lover is justification enough to cross-dress. His indulgent attitude toward both Silla and Emelia seems inconsistent with the disdain he exhibited toward cross-dressing in the preface to his stories.

Cross-dressing is such a popular convention of narrative disguise that it often appears habitual or ordinary. In *The Troublesome and*

Hard Adventures in Love, a knight relates how his beloved Eleonora came to him one evening “in the habit of a gentleman Page, because she should not be knowne.” The knight implies that such disguising commonly occurs, at least in the world of fiction.⁸³ Later in the narrative, the Duchess Brisil contemplates wearing several male disguises in order to see her captive lover Periander and becomes both a shipboy and an Egyptian fortuneteller.⁸⁴ These disguises serve a practical function because they allow Eleonora and Brisil to meet with their male lovers. These instances ignore the homoerotic potential of male disguise, primarily because the cross-dressed women never approach other female characters. Rather, the text focuses on and applauds their clever fortitude to be with the men they love.

One of the most honorable, and therefore sympathetic, cross-dressed women to appear in narrative form is the merchant’s wife from the tale *Frederyke of Jennen*, a source for Shakespeare’s *Cymbeline*, published in an English translation in 1560.⁸⁵ After being wrongfully dishonored, the merchant’s wife uses male disguise to escape the city—another escape from unacceptable male behavior—and takes the name Frederyke. In quick succession, she becomes falconer to the king of Alkares, an officer of his court, a knight, and a lord. The king even designates Frederyke as his minister when the rest of the court leaves to avoid the plague. In the king’s absence, Frederyke defends the kingdom against attack, going into battle and distinguishing herself at feats of arms and military strategy. For her deeds, the king appoints Frederyke lord protector and defender of the realm, and she rules for twelve years. Through her long period of disguise, Frederyke remains chaste and no one at court questions her gender or finds her attractive. Frederyke’s virtue remains uncontaminated by transgressive desire.

Unlike the asexuality of *Frederyke of Jennen*, Thomas Lodge does raise the specter of homoeroticism in the 1590 romance *Rosalynde: Euphues’ Golden Legacy*—the narrative source of *As You Like It*—only to constrain and ultimately deny it. A minor sexual complication enters the plot in the form of the shepherdess Phoebe, who languishes for the disguised female page Rosalynde. In this plot, clothes make the man, for what Phoebe found painfully desirable in male apparel she easily rejects in women’s garments. Seeing Rosalynde dressed like a woman becomes an immediate “persuasive” for Phoebe to deny her attraction and take the adoring Montanus as a husband instead.⁸⁶

The cross-dressed female character also appeared in nonhomoerotic contexts in Elizabethan ballads. One of the most popular of these heroines is Elise from the often reprinted sixteenth-century ballad

"The Famous Flower of Serving-Men; or, The Lady Turned Serving-Man."⁸⁷ After bandits kill her husband, Elise changes her name to William, cuts her hair, dresses in male attire, and travels to court to become the king's chamberlain. One day, while the king is off hunting, William/Elise sings of her past life. An old man at court overhears her song and tells the king that William/Elise is a woman. Overjoyed by the news, the king promptly marries Elise. This conclusion implies that the king found Elise attractive in her male disguise, and suggests a male homoerotic tension; however, the text never reveals the king's attraction prior to his knowledge that Elise is female.

Another popular ballad that includes a cross-dressed woman is the episodic tale "The Merchant's Daughter of Bristow" dated "considerably before" the reign of James I.⁸⁸ Maudlin, the heroine of this ballad, talks a sea captain into disguising her as a shipboy and taking her to Padua to be with her lover, who is despised by her friends and family. Before the captain and Maudlin are able to sail safely away, however, they meet with Maudlin's parents, who do not recognize their daughter. Gendered clothing proves an effective disguise of biological sex because her parents fail to see beyond the social contract of dress while Maudlin understands its fluidity. Male clothes transform Maudlin into a boy even for her parents.

While texts justify the cross-dressing of figures such as Silla, Emelia, and the merchant's wife to escape antisocial male behavior, and applaud characters such as Maudlin, Brisil, and Eleonora for using disguise to rendezvous with male lovers, the most sympathetic and celebrated cross-dressed heroines are those who use disguise to defend their country. An extremely popular cross-dressed heroine was the title character of the widely reproduced late-sixteenth-century ballad "Mary Ambree," which tells the story of a woman who dresses as a soldier and fights in the 1586 battle of Ghent.⁸⁹ The ballad, a panegyric to England's female monarch, valorizes Mary's heroism, and it would be difficult to identify a stronger, more noble and sympathetic cross-dressed heroine in English literature. Like the romantic narratives in this section, these particular ballads do not use their cross-dressed characters to explore the complexities of sexual identity, although the transvestite female character in ballads had that potential.⁹⁰

Of course, nonhomoerotic representations of cross-dressed women also appeared in English dramatic literature, just as they had in romantic narratives and ballads, before the close of the sixteenth century. For example, *Promos and Cassandra*, the chief source of Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, written by George Whetstone and printed in 1578, is one of the earliest English plays to present the cross-dressed

female figure.⁹¹ In this text, Cassandra goes to her appointed assignation with the corrupt Promos disguised like a page, which the text treats solely as a pragmatic action used to protect her reputation.⁹² Of course, the attendant, illicit sexual attraction of the scene implicates her disguise as a device of transgressive sexual exchange, just not a homoerotic one in this case. The tragedy *Soliman and Perseda*, printed in 1599, also includes female cross-dressing as an expedient action, used here to conclude the story.⁹³ Late in act five, Perseda, the heroine of the tragedy, dresses as a man to revenge the death of her lover Erastus. When Soliman, who loves Perseda and killed Erastus, brings an army to Rhodes to capture her, she dresses like a man and stands in defense of the city. Perseda challenges Soliman to single combat, employing the disguise to achieve an ironic death by compelling Soliman to kill her.⁹⁴ The disguise is essential to provoke Soliman into combat.

Another play, the anonymous *Philotus*, printed in 1603 but probably from an earlier date, is a dramatic version of the "Phylotus and Emelia" of Riche.⁹⁵ Here, Emilie escapes marriage to the old man, Philotus, by disguising as a page and running off with her young male lover. When a servant reports her absence, her father and would-be husband set out to find her. Instead, they find Philerno, Emilie's long-lost twin brother, and assume he is Emilie in disguise. Philotus takes Philerno back to his house to await the wedding day and lodges him with his daughter, the beautiful Brisilla, who is unhappily espoused to Emilie and Philerno's father. Philerno, pretending to be Emilie, tells Brisilla that he wishes a goddess would change him into a man so that they could marry each other and avoid being sacrificed to elderly husbands. Invoking the myth of Iphis, Philerno pretends to undergo a sex change and the play resolves in favor of youthful matrimony. However, although the plot affords many opportunities to introduce homoerotically charged desires, none appear. Philerno only attracts Brisilla once he declares himself male—disguised as Emilie he holds little sexual interest for her.

Perhaps the most vigorous and revered cross-dressed woman to appear within a play before the death of Elizabeth I is Bess Bridges in Thomas Heywood's play *The Fair Maid of the West; or, A Girl Worth Gold*.⁹⁶ Jean Howard reads Bess to some extent as a representation of Elizabeth I. Like her name sake, Bess is a desired but chaste virgin, an exceptional woman capable of uniting a divisive male populace, and a figure promoting the value and honor of an aggressive but stable commerce.⁹⁷ Early in the play, Bess cures the bully Roughman of his cowardice by pretending to be her own brother and humiliating the pretentious gallant in a secluded field. When Roughman realizes

a woman has bested him, he resolves to change his ways and faithfully follows Bess through her subsequent adventures. Bess devises her Roughman scheme after comparing her own valor with Mary Ambree and Long Meg's of Westminster, and like those heroines Bess becomes a figure of nationalistic pride. Disguised as a sea captain and commanding a ship of adoring Englishmen, Bess voyages to retrieve the body of her slain lover. In swashbuckling fashion, she pirates all Spanish ships she finds—blaming Spaniards for her lover's death—and refuses to be left out of any action: "I will face the fight, / And where the bullets sing loud'st 'bout mine ears, / There shall you find me cheering up my men" (4.4.91–93). Bess is brave, witty, assiduously loyal, extremely clever, stunningly beautiful, and a paragon of virtue who displays a blushing humility only when compared with that other Elizabeth. Heywood does not position her with other female characters and provides no hint of homoerotic energy through her cross-dressed disguise.

As these examples illustrate, in fictional narratives female transvestism could be lightly comic, valorous, or tragic, while at the same time nonfictional narratives ridiculed and condemned female transvestism. Critics such as Shapiro, Howard, Orgel, and Trubowitz ultimately reach different conclusions regarding the incongruity of cross-dressing, but all identify the ambiguity surrounding the practice in early modern England. This ambiguity, caused by the contradiction between the popularity of the cultural practice and the zealous criticism against it and exaggerated by the long romanticized tradition of cross-dressing in literature, is a part of what made it such an effective literary device in the construction of female homoeroticism. English playwrights negotiated the slippery cultural landscape in which female cross-dressing appeared by balancing its potential social transgression with a literary tradition of romanticized and heroic cross-dressed heroines. Homoeroticism is not an inherent trait of the cross-dressed heroine, but a literary construct that only emerges when two female subjects appear in a consciously eroticized context.

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CHAPTER 2



PLAYFULLY EMERGENT LESBIAN EROTICS

The cross-dressed heroine was a popular convention in early modern drama—according to Michael Shapiro, nearly eighty texts include the character type.¹ Women dress as men in plays to follow lovers, to help them, or to keep them away from other women; to avoid rape, scandal, or death; to travel the countryside freely, and, as is the case of Moll Cutpurse in Dekker and Middleton's *The Roaring Girl*, to express gender choices.² In early modern drama, women in male disguise and the women who desire them can also signify same-sex attraction. Roughly, thirty plays between 1580 and 1660 that employ cross-dressing also include scenarios of female homoerotic desire. Of course, not all cross-dressed heroines evoke a female–female erotic tension, and not all female homoerotics issue from disguised female characters. Why, then, is the disguised heroine such a common plot element in plays that evoke female same-sex desire? What benefit does she offer—what use is the convention to early modern playwrights? Moreover, how do these plays signify homoerotic constructions?

Sixteenth-century textual representations of female–female desire and sexual behaviors, like those discussed in chapter 1, were available to English playwrights and at least to the educated members of their audience. Therefore, when dramatists positioned female characters together in erotically coded situations, they could be confident that a portion, if not all, of their audience could discern homoerotic references. To construct erotic tension between two female characters, playwrights often employed the narrative convention of the cross-dressed female heroine whose sartorial codes signify her as male.

When she becomes a potential object of desire for another woman, the erotic energy that passes between the disguised heroine and the desiring subject resonates with a broader cultural awareness of female–female desire and sexual practices, signifying those very behaviors and longings to the audience. From the viewer’s perspective, though, neither the cross-dressed heroine nor the desiring subject is an entirely transgressive figure. The plot not only supplies a legitimate reason for the heroine’s disguise, but the disguise itself alleviates the desiring subject’s guilt over her feelings for and actions toward another woman. Cross-dressing thus shields dramatic characters from the kind of hostility directed at homoeroticism in nonfiction because the attraction may be excused as an error rather than an intent. Because the disguise creates ambiguous sexual tensions, audiences could perceive homoerotic attractions as benign, which therefore rendered those representations acceptable. Playwrights employed the disguised heroine as a dramaturgical device to construct pleasurable homoerotic situations between women. Drawing from cultural representations of transgressive sexual expressions, playwrights could present imaginative tropes of female homoerotic desire.

The mere presence of a transvestite character, however, does not evoke female homoeroticism in a literary narrative. As chapter 1 argues, while public discourse ridiculed and condemned female transvestism, literary narratives presented female transvestism as comic, valorous, and tragic. On the one hand, then, a woman disguised as a man in early modern drama references the transgressive sexuality of nonfictional narratives and evokes the specter of illicit sexual practice. As Kathryn Schwarz argues, the incongruity between gender and sex presented by a masculinized female figure could lead to an “assumption of deviant sexuality,” both homo- and heteroerotic.³ On the other hand, early modern playwrights constructed female homoerotic desire without the threat of its fulfillment because cross-dressed characters and their desiring subjects are otherwise heterosexually encoded. As Jean Howard stated, “the meaning of cross-dressing varied with the circumstances of its occurrence, with the particulars of the institutional or cultural sites of its enactment, and with the class position of the transgressor.”⁴ Situated in fiction—and, more specifically, in romantic comedy—the cross-dressed female character provokes humor rather than anxiety. These characters do not fit Valerie Traub’s *femme/tribade* binary, making them more erotically flexible in the homoerotic subtext they construct.⁵ Early modern playwrights used transvestism to suggest a transgressive sexuality and positioned their disguised heroines in erotic situations with other female characters

to identify the transgression with homoerotic desires, but carefully avoided censure that might have resulted from female characters whose behavior was too masculine or aggressively sexual.

This chapter examines English dramatic literature, primarily comedies that include a cross-dressed female character and which use that character to construct scenarios of female homoerotic desire between women. It focuses on comedies because that genre tends to use representations of female same-sex eroticism to complicate the narrative's drive toward sexual fulfillment. Female homoeroticism emerges as a comic impediment to heterosexual unions, an obstacle that can become the primary focus of the text, and that is often more compassionate and lively than the heterosexual unions that ultimately replace it. In these texts, playwrights construct playful representations of female homoerotic desire. Section I introduces the convention of the cross-dressed heroine desired by another woman by looking at the foundations of that scenario in Italian comedies adapted by English playwrights. It also notes simple occurrences and identifies characteristics of the convention in English comedy. Section II discusses the early tradition of female cross-dressing and female homoerotics in romantic comedies and romances. Finally, section III investigates constructions of female homoerotic scenarios in seventeenth-century city comedies.

I FOUNDATION AND CHARACTERISTICS OF PLAYFULLY EMERGENT CONSTRUCTIONS

Italian comedies that used cross-dressed heroines as a character convention influenced English playwrights who portrayed cross-dressed women.⁶ Members of Cambridge University translated two such Italian plays as a part of the tradition of performing Latin drama that was popular at both Cambridge and Oxford.⁷ *Labyrinthus*, written by Walter Hawkesworth, was based on Giambattista della Porta's *La Cintia*, and the anonymous *Laelia*—one of several possible sources for *Twelfth Night*—was ultimately based on *Gl' Ingannati* written by the Accademici Intronati di Siena in 1531.⁸ The existence of these plays, especially *Labyrinthus*, which Hawkesworth produced within two years of the Italian original, suggests the popularity of homoerotic constructions in early modern continental drama.⁹

Both plays focus on plot rather than characterization, especially the complicated *Labyrinthus* (1603). The action follows Lucretia (Lucretius), a woman disguised as a man and in love with her best friend Horatius. Horatius, unfortunately, loves Lepidus (Lepida), a man

disguised as a woman; Lepidus loves Lydia, Horatius's sister; and Lydia loves the cross-dressed Lucretia. Within these attractions, the play presents two heterosexual affections that are sartorially coded homosexual—Lucretia's love for Horatius and Lepidus's for Lydia—and two homoerotically structured attractions that appear heterosexual to their desiring subjects—Lydia's love for Lucretia and Horatius's for Lepidus. Like Sidney's *Arcadia*, with its multiple constructs of erotic attraction, Hawkesworth's play evokes female and male homoerotic desire as well as heterosexual desires. In the intricate networks of this quadrilateral romance, gender disguise obfuscates sexual attraction, allowing a fluid movement between homoerotic and heteroerotic desire. Lydia is "on fire with love" (2.2.80) for the disguised Lucretia; she loves the "charms," "beauty," "eyes, and those sterling qualities of behavior and character" that Lucretia exhibits (1.9.9–11).¹⁰ Feminine qualities attract the desiring subject to the cross-dressed heroine. Women are wildly attracted to the beauty of another woman in male disguise. They also seem very attracted to the disguised heroine's "behavior and character." Women as men present a figure whose personal characteristics—deference, compassion, and gallantry—appeal over male conduct, or male interpretations of those same characteristics. Unfortunately, Lucretia returns none of Lydia's affection, and indicates instead scorn, derision, and only minimal compassion.

When Lucretia rejects Lydia, the latter finds emotional and physical comfort from the disguised Lepidus. As he consoles Lydia, he barely veils his desire for her, and since his disguise is unknown, the action presents a visual image of female–female sensuality on stage. In fact, moments before Lepidus reveals his male identity, the scene teases the spectators with an overtly homoerotic picture. Lydia declares that she would have been "quite lost" (1.6.8) without Lepida, who is more fond of Lydia than a woman should be. Lepida's jealousy of Lucretius is evident, and she swears that no "man in the world would take Lydia away" from her if she were a man (1.6.73). Then she tells Lydia's nurse that she wants Lydia to love her not as a sister, but the way she loves Lucretius. Only after this provocative revelation does the audience discover Lepida's true sex. For her part, Lydia accepts Lepida's attentions amiably, knowing Lepida "desire[s]" her love "more than anything else" (1.9.100), and she wants Lepida to "go on loving" her (1.9.4). However, Lydia becomes uncomfortable when Lepida kisses her in public, not with the kiss itself, but with its display: "Oh you wicked girl. In public like this? . . . Aren't you ashamed of anything?" (1.8.129–1.9.1). The nature of the kiss and Lydia's response suggests that society condoned erotic behavior between women as long as

those intimacies occurred in the confines of the home. Lepida kisses and fondles Lydia so often in the scene that by the end Lydia finds herself wishing Lepida was male—the character enjoys the sexual stimulation of another “woman,” but assumes that a male partner is required for sexual fulfillment. *Labyrinthus* plays with homoeroticism as arousal, as titillation, as comic excitement but never suggests it might be an alternative to heterosexuality.

Unlike Lucretia, the title character of the anonymous *Laelia* (1595) fully enjoys the attention of another woman. In the play’s exposition, the audience learns that Laelia and Flaminius had a brief affair, but when Laelia was sent to a monastery for safe keeping, the capricious Flaminius fell in love with Isabella. Desperate to be with Flaminius but fearful of her reputation, Laelia disguised herself as a boy and became his servant. Flaminius employs her to carry messages to Isabella, who herself has fallen desperately in love with the young page. During the action, Laelia uses her disguise and Isabella’s infatuation to her advantage, for she pretends to return Isabella’s love, just as the disguised Filesmena does in Montemayor’s *Diana*. However, Laelia also pressures Isabella to discard Flaminius. Laelia seems to enjoy her intrigue, and after Isabella kisses her, she declares:

In biuio nunc sum, nescio qua ingrediundum sit via,
lubenter quod feliciter satis inceptum est
ad finem perducere.
At nec sine illa hoc possum, nec cum illa, ita vt res habet
factum iam suavius pepigit. quid faciendum est postmodum?
Ibo ad nutricum, ab illa consilium petam. (2.5.71–76)

[I am at a crossroads now—I do not know which way to go—how to finish pleurably what was begun happily enough. But I cannot do it neither without her nor with her; as things stand now, the affair has proceeded smoothly, but what should be done finally? I will go to the nurse, I will seek advice from her.]¹¹

Laelia is aware that her affair has reached a “crossroads.” While her time with Isabella began “happily enough,” she can no longer maintain her disguise against Isabella’s persistent affections. Laelia, in fact, does not appear with Isabella again in the play. Flirting with and kissing another woman are pleasurable, but Laelia seems unwilling to take matters any further sexually, and would be discovered if she did. Still, Laelia, unlike her immediate descendant Viola, welcomes the affections of another woman and manipulates the desiring subject for her own purposes. Not all disguised heroines shrink from the affections of

other women and *Laelia* provides an early model for the more adventurous of them.

As a standard convention of early modern English drama, cross-dressed heroines, such as Lucretia and Laelia, appear regularly through the late sixteenth and the first half of the seventeenth century, and as Lucretia and Laelia, disguised heroines are quite capable of arousing complicated erotic responses. William Rowley and Thomas Middleton equate the erotic potential of this kind of gender disguise with the erotic potential of all performance in *The Spanish Gipsie* (1623). The play acknowledges that gender confusion disrupts the dichotomy of heterosexual object choice and makes it possible for women to be attracted to other women. In the narrative, Pretiosa—actually the princess Constanza who was thought to have drowned long ago—lives like a gypsy with her aunt. Pretiosa's uncle declares that her innate nobility will make people assume she is actually a boy in women's clothing (nobility being apparently an exclusively male characteristic) and cautions her against becoming a changeling. Pretiosa responds, "I'll change my selfe into a thousand shapes / To court our brave Spectators; I'll change my postures / Into a thousand different variations, / To draw even Ladies eyes to follow mine" (sig. C3v).¹² Pretiosa's remarks profess her willingness to attract female desire to secure her family's economic health, but also acknowledges the erotic appeal of mimesis.¹³ She represents the women in this chapter who are forced by circumstances to play a male role, but also gleefully embrace the sexual complications inherent in male disguise.

Well known social codes and patterns of class and gender behavior guide these cross-dressed heroines in their relationships with women and often lead to comic situations as they attempt to navigate their way in foreign territory. In Lording Barry's *Ram-Alley* (1607–08), Constantia, in love with Boutcher, disguises herself as a servant boy to be near him. Despite the fact that Constantia's "feminine bloud" is stirred by the sight of her male clothes, and she fears her "cod-peece / Should betray" her (sig. A3), she suppresses her sexual embarrassment and plays the lively lad.¹⁴ When Boutcher visits Mistress Taffata, Constantia follows him and endeavors to play the saucy page she thinks she should be. Screwing up her courage she "fall[s] a boord the waiting maide" who, unfortunately, overhears and rebukes Constantia's impertinence: "Blurt master gunner, your lin stocks too short" (sig. B2v).¹⁵ Constantia acknowledges the irony of the bawdy pun on "linstock," but challenges: "Should not the page be doing with the maid, / Whilst the master is busie with the mistris" (sig. B2v). Adriana, the maid, rewards Constantia's perseverance by inviting her

inside and later agrees to an assignation because she loves “to play with such babounes as thou” (sig. D2).¹⁶ Constantia’s reply “Indeed,” contains an ironic innuendo that references the surface construction of relations between older women and young boys, but also ironically imagines bestiality through the “baboune” reference, male homoeroticism in the metatheatrical acknowledgement of the male bodies performing the roles, and female homoeroticism through the female characterizations. Like Constantia, many cross-dressed characters, especially those in romantic comedies, understand the erotic potential of their disguise and are not reticent about using it advantageously.

In early modern English comedy, female characters often fall under the charms of a cross-dressed heroine. The Hostesse in John Fletcher’s *Love’s Pilgrimage* (1616), for instance, finds the disguised Theodosia “So sweet a creature,” one of “the loveliest peeces,” with “the delicat’st flesh” (sig. Aaaaaaa2).¹⁷ Earlier the Hostesse drew upon floral imagery to describe Theodosia, emphasizing both her youth and her physical beauty. Lest there be any question of her attraction, one of the other characters declares that the Hostesse has fallen in love with the young stranger. Another instance in which a woman becomes infatuated with a disguised heroine occurs in Peter Hausted’s *The Rivall Friends* (1632), in which Merda, a simple country girl, falls for a cross-dressed woman. When she sees Constantina dressed like a boy, Merda falls instantly in love: “Truely me thinkes I could e’ne love this Boy / ‘Tis such a pretty thing” (sig. E4), and she attempts to kiss Constantina.¹⁸ Similarly, Shackerly Marmion’s Aemilia in *The Antiquary* (1634–36) finds herself attracted to the new household page—Angelia in disguise. The “smooth visage” and “beauty” of this “pretty youth” entices Aemilia to an adulterous seduction (sig. D3v, H1).¹⁹ While Aemilia promises a “lustfull dalliance” (sig. G4), the disguised Angelia argues that she is too young, wants to save herself for marriage, and finds Aemilia’s wedding vows a deterrence to their affair. In these examples, characters assume that secondary sex characteristics, namely clothing, define the biological sex of the individual wearing them, and that assumption on the part of a woman who finds the cross-dressed figure desirable—like Aemilia, Merda, and the Hostesse—is what allows these authors to construct a homoerotic narrative within an otherwise heterosexual plot.

Scripting female characters that fall in love with cross-dressed women remained an active convention through the Interregnum. For example, in Margaret Cavendish’s early play *Love’s Adventures* (1658), which echoes the plot of *Twelfth Night*, Lady Orphant, betrothed to the military Lord Singularity as a child but later jilted by him, dresses

like a young male beggar and joins his camp.²⁰ There, not only does Singularity, who swore he would never care for any woman, develop a fondness for the girl-in-boy's-clothing, but Lady Wagtail and Lady Amorous also find the disguised Orphant to be "the sweetest, and most beautifullest young Cavalier" they ever saw, "he appears like Adonis (sig. S2).²¹ Late in the play, Wagtail's interest shifts to Singularity because she refuses to demean herself by slutting after a beggar boy even though Amorous makes an impassioned plea in favor of interclass unions. However, when Amorous discovers that the beggar boy is Orphant, she immediately transfers her affections to Singularity as well. Transgressing class boundaries might be exotically compelling, but in the end Amorous gives no thought to violating social expectations surrounding gender and sexuality.

Ram-Alley, *The Spanish Gipsie*, *Love's Pilgrimage*, *The Rivall Friends*, *The Antiquary*, and *Love's Adventures* all demonstrate two traits that appear regularly in the comedies discussed in this chapter. First, women attracted to cross-dressed characters are often drawn to traditionally feminine characteristics. The disguised heroine is rarely thought courageous, strong, martial, or manly in any way; she has little in common with the Ides, Britomarts, or Bradamants of romantic fiction. Rather, desiring subjects immediately note their attraction to the cross-dressed woman's beauty, sweetness, and fair delicate features, or her kind, courteous disposition. These qualities spark desire where they would be otherwise ignored, or the desire suppressed, if they were seen in a conventionally dressed woman because the cross-dressed figure presents herself as an appropriate object of sexual interest through the male disguise. Second, desiring female subjects are often represented as intellectually, emotionally, or morally deficient in some regard: the simple, callous shepherdess Merda, the over-eager Hostesse, the adulterous Aemilia, as well as the aristocratic but canting Lady Wagtail and Lady Amorous. Certainly, the plays usually reward both the disguised heroine and the desiring subject with heterosexual marriage at the end of each drama. However, homoerotic affection serves as a corrective for a variety of faults in the desiring subject, who is often betrothed to a male of lesser status than the man the disguised heroine marries, as if, although now cured of her delusion, she has proven herself unworthy of a greater prize.

II FEMALE HOMOEROTICISM IN SIXTEENTH-CENTURY COMEDIES

As this chapter demonstrates, constructions of female homoeroticism in early modern drama emerge out of sexual ambiguity created by the

cross-dressed figure and are manipulated through the positioning of female characters and language. One of the earliest plays to present the homoerotic potential of the cross-dressed female heroine is the anonymous *Clyomon and Clamydes*, printed in 1599.²² The play, which mimics the episodic structure of medieval romance, belongs to the vogue of romantic drama popular between 1570 and 1585, and while its production history is unknown, its accreditation to the Queen's Company, the major Elizabethan troupe before the Lord Chamberlain's Men, attests to its status.²³ The cross-dressed character in the play is the princess Neronis, who loves Clyomon, one of the titular knights. She dons male disguise to evade the amorous advances of Thrasellus, the king of Norway, and runs off to a nearby forest. Neronis spends the last third of the play disguised as a page. When a shepherd predicts that her "brave" appearance will make her desirable to all the women in town, Neronis responds that she can flirt as well as any woman and says she welcomes the attention. Neronis's performance of male gender suppresses her biological identity—the shepherd perceives her as male—since the codification of gender performance conflates sex with the gender being performed. However, the text informs its audience of the discrepancy between gender performance and the character's sex and, therefore, opens the remark Neronis made to homoerotic interpretations. Ultimately, *Clyomon and Clamydes* restricts the homoerotic potential of its cross-dressed figure by not bringing her into contact with other female characters, but other comedies rely on encounters between the disguised heroine and desiring subject for their humor.

Shakespeare uses mistaken sexual identity in *Twelfth Night* to construct a homoerotic scenario between his two heroines and extends the homoerotic potential of these female characters past the concluding moments of the play. Olivia's attraction to Viola is predicated on Olivia's belief that Viola is a male page. Valerie Traub explains that Viola is not a passive object in the love intrigue since she "woos Olivia with a fervor that exceeds her 'text.'"²⁴ I agree, but see even more assertive homoeroticism in Olivia's actions. As Viola's language becomes less eroticized toward Olivia once she perceives its unwanted effect, Olivia's grows more seductive: "by the roses of the spring, / By maidhood, honour, truth, and every thing, / I love thee so" (3.1.149–51).²⁵ Although Viola loves Orsino, deflects Olivia's interest, and hints at her own female identity, Olivia's repeated flirtations create a homoerotic tension in the narrative space. What is more, as Shapiro has explained, the three scenes between Olivia and Viola happen privately, raising the expectation of physical intimacy between the characters.²⁶

More interesting, the final scene presents homosexual pairings within heterosexual unions. Shapiro and Mario DiGangi have noted the lack of interest Orsino and Sebastian display for Olivia and the real passions they direct toward male figures—Orsino toward Cesario and Sebastian toward Antonio.²⁷ Similarly, in the final scene Olivia directs her attention toward Viola rather than Sebastian. When Olivia enters act 5, she ignores Orsino and speaks to Viola, growing more emotional at each denial Viola makes of their union. She does not speak to Sebastian, even in response to his direct address: “So comes it, lady, you have been mistook” (5.1.259–63). Her earlier exclamation, “Oh, most wonderful” (5.1.225) is ambiguous since “wonderful” means to excite wonder or astonishment, and is a reaction to seeing two Cesarios, but is not directed at a specific character and does not specifically connote pleasure or joy.²⁸ The revelation that Sebastian and Viola are twins silences Olivia, who then speaks only in reference to Malvolio until she strikes on her plan for a double wedding: “To think me as well a sister as a wife, / One day shall crown th’alliance on’t, so please you, / Here at my house and at my proper cost” (5.1.317–19). Not only does Olivia instigate the nuptials, but she also proposes that they should take place together on her estate at her expense. Her urgency illustrates her desire to keep Viola as close as possible, and when Orsino agrees to her plan, Olivia’s outburst “A sister! you are she” (5.1.326) confirms her emotional investment in Viola rather than Sebastian. She greets Sebastian with astonishment but celebrates the consecration of her familial bond with Viola who becomes her sister-in-law. In a sense, the double wedding signifies her marriage to Viola as much as it does to Sebastian. The play thus closes on a homoerotically constructed passion, for Olivia is aware in the concluding scene that Viola is a woman and still endeavors to establish a lasting relationship. However, the ambiguity of the gender disguise, the confusion wrought by the reconciliation of Viola’s identical twin, and the heterosexual unions keep female homoeroticism ambivalent.

Shakespeare constructs a similar attraction between Phebe and Rosalind in *As You Like It*: a female body wearing male attire becomes an attractive object to another woman. As DiGangi explains, Phebe’s desire is both homoerotically and heteroerotically constructed because at the same moment that Phebe thinks she is attracted to a male body, the audience knows that the body she craves is that of a female.²⁹ This dual erotic allows an audience conscious of female homosexual practices to perceive the homoerotic potential in Phebe’s pursuit of Rosalind. In fact, as Traub has argued, Shakespeare tips the balance toward a homoerotic reading, for Phebe’s speech in act 3

reveals her attraction to the conventionally feminine qualities of Rosalind's disguised Ganymede.³⁰ Although neither of Shakespeare's plays presumes to break heterosexual authority by presenting mutual female attraction, both manipulate character and story to fashion a homoerotic tension between the actual and the perceived.

Another late-sixteenth-century play with a homoerotic female page is Robert Greene's *James IV*. The play was probably written for the Queen's Men for a production at court in the early 1590s, saw print in 1598, and, since Greene was a popular playwright with several London companies, was likely to have been "sundrie times publickly plaide," as the title page states.³¹ With the succession of the English throne still undetermined by an obdurate but adept Elizabeth, and James VI a very real claimant for the position, Greene's history play both looks back to the historical moment that occasioned James's possible ascent and critiques the Scottish candidate.³² In *James IV*, Greene manipulates cultural, gendered, and sexual identities in the service of satirical political discourse. The intersections of gender, sexuality, and national identity construct a colonial ideology that, on many levels, support the dominance of English authority over Scottish subjectivity and raise unsettling questions for Elizabeth's succession.³³

The story concerns Dorothea, the English-born queen of Scotland, who affects male disguise to avoid being assassinated by her husband, whom she, Griselda-like, continues to love throughout the play. This character finds male apparel distinctly uncomfortable, the thought of which makes her "blush and smile" (3.3.101), her qualms being a sign of her consummate, though compromised, feminine virtue. On this point Greene departs noticeably from the heroine in his source material, Cinthio's *Hecatommithi*, who is well versed in military arts and maintains her own set of armor. In *James IV*, Dorothea lacks martial prowess and, despite her attempts to escape, suffers a severe wound during the assassination attempt, but finds safety with a Scottish knight and his wife, Lady Anderson.

Lady Anderson, of course, falls passionately in love with her patient. Here again, homoerotic desire is possible only when intertwined with female transvestism. At the opening of act 5, a disguised Dorothea exchanges flirtatious dialogue with Lady Anderson, but Dorothea's servant cautions against such behavior:

Dorothea: Why are you so intente to behold My pale and woeful looks, by care controll'd?

Lady A: Because in them a ready way is found To cure my care and heal my hidden wound.

Nano: Good master, shut your eyes, keep that conceit; Surgeons give coin to get a good receipt.

Dorothea: Peace, wanton son: this lady did amend My wounds; mine eyes her hidden grief shall end. (5.1.17–24)³⁴

Dorothea willingly exchanges amorous looks and loving gazes with Lady Anderson as thanks for the other woman's care during her recovery. In this dialogue, Greene again departs from his source, in which the knight's wife likes the Dorothea character "not lasciviously," but rather "as a brother."³⁵ In addition, Cinthio's cross-dressed character leaves when she perceives the knight's jealousy, while Dorothea stays. When Dorothea is finally forced to reveal her sexual identity, Lady Anderson is appalled at having desired a woman and angry at Dorothea's deceit:

Lady A: Deceitful beauty, hast thou scorn'd me so?

Nano: Nay, muse not, madam, for she tells you true.

Lady A: Beauty bred love, and love hath bred my shame.

Nano: And women's faces work more wrongs than these; Take comfort, madam, to cure your disease. And yet she loves a man as well as you, Only this difference, she cannot fancy too.

Lady A: Blush, grieve, and die in thine insatiate lust!

Dorothea: Nay, live and joy that thou hast won a friend That loves thee as her life by good desert.

Lady A: I joy, my lord, more than my tongue can tell, Although not as I desired, I love you well. (5.5.46–57)

Lady Anderson's perception of Dorothea's sex, which she has read through the sartorial codes of gender signification, foster her desire for the cross-dressed heroine. Dorothea's body must be male since she displays masculine gendered clothing. The body itself, healed by Lady Anderson, apparently afforded no signifiers to discredit the sartorial coding, which raises intriguing questions about bodies and health care, as well as what an audience was expected to ignore in performance. Of course, Greene identifies the body not through physical presence, but through language and maintains Dorothea's female presence through textual techniques.³⁶ An awareness of Dorothea's female sex and her countenance of Lady Anderson's flirtation then present the spectator with the possibility of reading homoerotic desire in their relationship. The play locates female homoeroticism in the liminal space between gender and sex, creating ambiguities between desire, attraction, love, and friendship.

The homoeroticism in the text can also appear to support a project ridiculing the Scots if Lady Anderson is perceived as the naïve Scot whose ignorance makes her incapable of comprehension beyond the signs of sartorial signification.³⁷ Dorothea then becomes the good Tudor princess who suffers even the indignity of homoerotic attraction with grace, and her reunion with James IV represents the triumph of heterosexuality over homoerotic passion. However, Dorothea's flirtation contradicts this reading. Nano must restrain Dorothea's playful provocative actions from jeopardizing her disguise. The homoeroticism of her brief dalliance, in which she actively plays the man of Lady Anderson's desire, mitigates her intensely conventional femininity.

The plays discussed earlier, written between 1570 and 1602, represent Elizabethan drama; however, representations of female homoerotic desire in romantic comedy existed through the Cavalier period as well. Abraham Cowley's pastoral comedy, *Love's Riddle*, published in 1638 and popular enough to appear in a number of editions through the early eighteenth century, allows the cross-dressed heroine a great latitude in her relationships with female characters.³⁸ While the play follows techniques established in Shakespearean comedy—female cross-dressing, a pastoral or rustic setting, homoerotic attraction issuing from disguise—the play complicates the erotic energy between the female characters by constructing a heroine, like Greene's Dorothea, who welcomes same-sex attractions and places her between two desiring subjects. The action concerns Callidora, who avoids the violently amorous attentions of a suitor by adopting male disguise and escaping among shepherds in the nearby countryside. Calling herself, unimaginatively, Callidorus, she immediately relishes her status as an object of female desire, saying to one shepherdess after kissing her, "The honour of your lip is entertainment / Princes might wish for" (sig. B2v).³⁹ The women, in turn, discuss Callidora's physical attributes and the "honey" of her mouth in extensive detail. The full exchange illustrates two essential points. First, Callidora's feminine qualities attract the women—her fair skin, soft red lips, bright eyes, blushing cheeks, and beautiful hair—and heighten the homoerotic appeal of the scene. No other play is quite as specific about its disguised heroine's feminine characteristics. Second, as Callidora kisses the women, even the old, unpleasant Truga, and sweeps up the shepherdess Bellula in a dance to end the scene, we are treated to a heroine neither afraid of nor uncomfortable with physical contact with her own sex.

Later in the play, both Hylace and Bellula vie for Callidora's affection, which she enjoys until the rivals become too aggressive toward each other. Upon leaving them, Callidora says "I pittie both of you, for

you have sow'd / Upon unthankfull sand, whose dry'd up wombe / Nature denyes to blesse with fruitfulnessse, / You are both fayre, and more then common graces / In habite in you both, *Bellula's* eyes / Shine like the lampe of Heaven, and so doth *Hylaces*, / *Hylaces* cheekes are deeper dy'd in scarlet / Then the chaste mornings blushes, so are *Bellula's*, / And I protest I love you both. Yet cannot, / Yet must not enjoy either" (sig. B8v–C1). The full scene presents an extraordinary exchange between female characters as Cowley constructs a surprisingly long dialogue in which Callidora openly flirts with both women. What is more, she seems willing, at first, to fulfill their sexual desires, "Truly I would faine satisfie them both" (sig. B8v) but cannot conceive of the physical action and talks instead of the "impossibilitie which Nature / Hath set betwixt us, yet entangles us, / And laughs to see us struggle" (sig. C1). She ends the scene declaring that she "must not enjoy either," which suggests not the impossibility of female homosexual activity, but external constraints against such action, whether cultural, religious, or legal. For the remainder of the play, Bellula follows Callidora, trying to win her love, while Hylace continues to spurn her male lover.

In act 3, Callidora's long-absent brother Florellus arrives in the woods and instantly falls in love with Bellula. Neither sibling recognizes the other, and a delightful triangle ensues in which Bellula pursues Callidora, and Florellus pursues Bellula. Their dialogue echoes that of 5.2 in *As You Like It*; however, Cowley's scene goes further than Shakespeare's in displaying the complications of the three lovers, as they sit together, join hands, gaze upon each other, kiss, and sing of unrequited love. They spend the rest of the play together, each lover unwilling to leave the other, Callidora in resigned acceptance of Bellula's attraction.

When Callidora's female identity is discovered, and she is betrothed to her true love, Bellula sadly turns back to the forest, but Callidora stops her: "What, are you going *Bellula*? pray stay; / Though Nature contradicts our love, I hope / That I may have your friendship." Bellula replies, "My father calls; farewell; your name, and memory / In spite of Fate, I'll love, farewell" (sig. F4). In the end, both Bellula and Hylace marry men their parents choose, not so much out of their own pleasure, but out of duty to their fathers. Even after she learns that Callidora is a woman, Hylace seems to hesitate to give her up, saying "Why doe I doubt fond Girle? shee's now a woman" (sig. F6v). Neither Bellula nor Hylace appears happy with her intended husband, seeming to prefer the affection she enjoyed and the desire she felt for Callidora. While the play resolves the action with multiple heterosexual

unions, the passionate, emotional attachments between female characters—the homoerotic tensions—remain crucial.

Neronis, Olivia, Rosalind, Dorothea, and Callidora—like many other heroines in ballads, romances, and novellas fleeing incest, rape, and murder—choose cross-gender disguise as a way to escape the dangers that threaten women (forced marriage, rape, wife murder). They flee, like Rosalind and Celia, primarily to the “green world” of the forest and discover an unrestricted environment that supports a transgression of normative cultural roles and, hence, female homoeroticism. If the space of female–female desire is textually marked in various ways as an alternative to the normative space of patriarchal heterosexuality, then setting supports the narrativity in an exploration of female same-sex desire. The cross-dressed character in the unregulated medium of the forest further supports the liminality of female homoeroticism. These two narrative devices, transvestism and the green world, are textual practices that combine with character and a cultural understanding of female–female sexuality to construct the imaginative space of homoerotic signification.

Since cross-dressing does not itself constitute a female homoerotic, other textual signs must be compounded with the cross-dressing to achieve the effect. As Susan Bennett has explained, connotative possibilities make up part of a sign’s interpretation, and the chronology of a sign shapes its hermeneutic reception.⁴⁰ Therefore, to construct female homoerotic desire a playwright must represent at least one female character attracted to the cross-dressed figure, such as Phebe in *As You Like It*. The erotic context can be amplified by an extended verbal exchange between the cross-dressed heroine and the desiring subject, especially, as is true in *Twelfth Night*, during intimate scenes of attempted seduction. In contrast, even with its physicality and lengthy dialogues, *Love’s Riddle* maintains its playfulness because Callidora, like Rosalind or Dorothea, encounters her desiring subjects in the company of others. A degree of sexual apprehension breaks into act 2 only when Bellula and Hylace are together with the disguised Callidora in a secluded setting and Callidora exits that scene in some emotional discomfort. *Twelfth Night* becomes the most anxious of the cross-dressed plays in that Viola is the disguised heroine most vulnerable to homoerotic interests during her intimate dialogue with Olivia, and yet the construction protects Viola because unlike Callidora she attempts to dissuade Olivia of her passion.

However, the clustering of signs also shifts its specific connotations, and the cross-dressed heroine herself works against significations of transgressive sexuality.⁴¹ Early modern playwrights do not represent

cross-dressed heroines in romantic comedies as prostitutes or tribades, but as feminine, ultimately heterosexual women stuck in awkward situations. Many display their discomfort with masculine attire—even Rosalind ultimately despairs of her doublet and hose—which allows the audience to laugh at the sexual complications wrought by the desiring woman's misunderstanding and dispels the anxiety that might otherwise accrue to the homoerotic constructions. Only *Gallathea*, as we shall see in chapter 5, allows its heroines to desire one another mutually; however, its erotic construction is more emotional than physical and the eventual sex change promised at the play's conclusion drives the narrative. Careful manipulation of textual significations both elicited and suppressed female homoerotic desire on various levels within a text and carefully avoided engaging negative connotations.

III FEMALE HOMOEROTICISM IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY COMEDIES

Constructing homoerotic scenarios using a disguised heroine remained popular through the seventeenth century. Certain playwrights, in fact, seem drawn to the convention of the cross-dressed heroine and the homoerotic tension possible in the disguise. Textual representations of female homoerotics appear with some frequency in the works of Thomas Middleton, who apparently enjoyed playing with the erotic complications that emerged from the disguised heroine. Three of his plays, *Anything for a Quiet Life*, *The Widdow* (cowritten with Jonson and Fletcher), and *No Wit, No Help Like a Woman's* contain the convention of the cross-dressed female character who then becomes the object of another woman's affection. Of these three works, *Anything for a Quiet Life* (1620–21) mutes the erotic potential of the disguise. In the story, the impoverished George Cressingham dresses his wife as a page and puts her in the service of Lord Beaufort for "safe" keeping while George deals with the couple's strained financial affairs. Beaufort, whose profligacy includes inducing his lawyer Knaves-bee to prostitute his own wife, seems an odd choice for a guardian, however, disguised as a male, Mrs. Cressingham becomes not Beaufort's victim but his rival.

Middleton seems to keep this cross-dressed character a secret until late in the action.⁴² Neither Mrs. Cressingham's disguise nor her marital status is revealed until the end of act 5, and the cast of characters lists only her disguised personae: "Selenger, Page to the Lord Beaufort," without other identification (sig. A2).⁴³ Mrs. Cressingham is also

a minor character, appearing in only one scene before the final action. Her sole function is to become the means by which Mrs. Knaves-bee, Sib, protects her honor from Beaufort, and she is a passive object in Sib's witty intrigue. Sent by her husband to sleep with Beaufort, Sib instead entangles Mrs. Cressingham, literally trapping her by winding her hands in a skein of gold thread: "you are mine now, my captive manacled, I have your hands in bondage" (sig. D3v). Sib uses her dominance flirtatiously, asserting "I could kiss you now spite of your teeth, if it please me" (sig. D3v), but she only uses the page to deceive the master. She exposes Beaufort's crude impudence by asking him to command Mrs. Cressingham to sleep with her: "you may command him, sir; if not affection, yet his body, and I desire but that, do't, and I'll command my self your prostitute" (sig. D4v). By making herself coarse in Beaufort's eyes, she cools his interest and mocks the sensuality he found in the original sexual arrangement.

Sib also uses Mrs. Cressingham against her husband late in the action to make him jealous. Knaves-bee tells Beaufort: "I am kept out of mine own Castle, my Wife keeps the Hold against me: your Page my Lord, is her Champion: I summon'd a Parle at the window, was answered with Defiance: they confess they have layen together, but what they have done else I know not" (sig. G4v). Immediately after this, Mrs. Cressingham appears "as a woman" with Sib, suggesting that at some point in the action Mrs. Cressingham takes refuge with her onetime tormentor and the two women conspire together. This homosocial bond heightens the homoerotic construct, as, sheltered from any men and now clearly visible as two women, Sib confesses "We lay together in bed, it is confest; you, and your ends of Law makes worser of it, I did it for reward" (sig. H1). Sib and Mrs. Cressingham band together against unjust husbands and tyrannical suitors and ultimately use fears of female subjectivity and sexual independence to subdue wayward men. These concluding lines are of particular importance because, unlike romantic comedies, Middleton constructs a homoerotic sexual reference between two women both dressed in female apparel and conscious of one another's identity.

Like *Anything for a Quiet Life*, *The Widdow* (1615–17) expands the convention of the cross-dressed heroine in romantic comedy and evokes both female and male homoerotic imagery. Act 3 of Middleton's play introduces the audience to Martia, the young daughter of an old suitor to a wealthy widow. She escapes an enforced marriage and appears in disguise as Ansaldo. Before the act ends, bandits strip her of all but her shirt and horse, but she finds assistance from Philippa and her servant Violetta. Philippa is waiting for a rendezvous with her

lover, but his absence is easily filled by Martia, who appears to Violetta to be a "Sweet youth . . . the loveliest / Proper'st young gentleman" (sig. Flv).⁴⁴ Martia, unable to stay, promises a speedy return, and Philippa confesses she "shall long mightily to see him agen" (sig. F3). The text takes on multifaceted sexual contexts late in the action when Martia returns to Philippa's and is "disguised" in female clothes to hide "Ansald's" identity from Philippa's husband. Also present is Francisco, Philippa's former lover. Francisco instantly falls in love with Martia, and Philippa and Violetta deride what they think is a homoerotic attraction.

Middleton constructs a scenario of male homoeroticism even earlier in the play when Francisco practices talking to women with his friend Ricardo. They alternate playing the woman, but, when Francisco takes the female role, he treats Ricardo so scornfully that Ricardo accepts the challenge in earnest.

Ricardo: Though you seem to be careless Madam, as you have enough wherwith all to be yet I doe, must, and will love you.

Francisco: Sir, if you begin to be rude, ile call my woman.

Ricardo: What a pestilent Queans this? I shall have much adoe with her
I see that; tell me as y'ar a woman Lady, what serve kisses for? but to stop all your mouths.

Francisco: Hold, hold Ricardo.

Ricardo: Disgrace me Widow.

Francisco: Art mad, I'm Francisco? (sig. Clv-C2)

Ricardo is clearly about to kiss this insolent "woman" when Francisco drops the masquerade. However, Ricardo is more upset about having his fantasy disturbed than about kissing another man: "A bots on thee, thou do'st not know what injury thou hast done me, I was i'th' fairest dream" (sig. C2). Middleton also reminds the audience of the play's female homoeroticism when Philippa's husband Brandino and his clerk Martino imagine his wife sharing a bed with their female guest:

Martino: Oh Master, here's a rare Bedfellow for my Mistris to night,
For you know we must both out of Town agen.

Brandino: That's true Martino.

Martino: I do but think how they'l lye telling of tales together. The pretiest.

Brandino: The pretiliest indeed.

Martino: Their tongues will never lyn wagging Master.

Brandino: Never Martino, never. (sig. Ilv)

Brandino, who finds Martia attractive, seems transported by Martino's description into a reverie of female homoerotic sensuality. Middleton

encourages the audience, through Brandino's imaging, to see the erotic potential of two women in bed, with heavy innuendo on their tongues "wagging." Heterosexuality might be the dominant social model, but Middleton suggests that bodies are sexually polymorphous in what excites, attracts, and fulfills them sexually. Female bodies together and male bodies together are sexually stimulating in their erotic appeal to members of the same and opposite sex. Middleton presents this mutability with regard to sexual attraction and fulfillment in both his *The Spanish Gipsie* and *The Roaring Girl*, and the flexibility of sexual attraction appears to be one of his primary topics.

Variable sexual attractions also exist in *No Wit, No Help Like a Woman's* (1613–27). In this play, the married Kate Low-water dresses like a man and presents herself as a suitor to the wealthy Lady Goldenfleece, a widow who cheated Kate's family out of their inheritance. Unlike the cross-dressed figures in *Anything for a Quiet Life* and *The Widdow*, Kate first appears on stage dressed as a woman before she dons her disguise to regain her family's lost income. Middleton also foregrounds the character's femininity by continuously referring to not only Kate's female biology but also her marital status throughout the play.⁴⁵ Dressed like a man then, Kate makes such an appealing but somewhat ambiguous figure that she attracts both men and women. For example, during her initial appearance in disguise, Weatherwise, one of the many widow hunters, remarks ironically that Kate is "a proper woman turn'd gallant!" and goes on to reason that "If the widow refuse me, I care not if I be a suitor to him. I have known those who have been as mad, and given half their living for a male companion" (2.1.180–82).⁴⁶ Shortly after, Goldenfleece is equally taken: "The more I look on him, the more I thirst for't. / Methinks his beauty does so far transcend" (2.1.207–09). Weatherwise leaves little doubt that men in early modern England found one another erotically attractive, and Goldenfleece's interest in Kate's "beauty" suggests that women were equally attracted to each other. Susan Zimmerman has argued that this play and *The Widdow* have a "preoccupation with sexual deviance."⁴⁷ According to Zimmerman, Jacobean playwrights manipulated the male actor playing a female character disguised as a man to confuse sexual object choice making multiple erotic attractions possible. Certainly, the transvestite acting convention provided a "sexual indeterminacy" that allowed a "democratic eroticism," but playwrights constructed homoerotic representations in their texts more carefully than her "jumbling of overlapping sexual nuances" suggests.⁴⁸ Middleton's deliberate movement between instances of female homoeroticism, male homosexuality, and

heterosexuality requires exact plotting and language and relies on specific uses, combinations, and attractions of female characters in both male and female attire; as well as male reactions to those female characters, homoerotic situations, and each other.

Kate, like her predecessors Neronis, Rosalind, and Callidora, represents one of the swaggering disguised heroines who approaches her role with confident mirth and zeal. While her husband worries about her honor, as well he might, she entices Goldenfleece to marry her. In an intimate scene between the two women, a brazen Kate tempts the widow to sleep with her immediately, "Come make but short service, widow, a kiss and to bed" (2.3.125).⁴⁹ The erotic tension of the scene builds until Kate's husband, to her relief, interrupts them. Earlier they had planned for just such an event because Kate worried she might "shame myself" (2.3.98). Kate fears that her role will arouse her, like Ricardo in Middleton's *The Widdow*, to physical manifestations of homoerotic contact or that she will be forced to carry the disguise too far for her own comfort. A few lines later, Goldenfleece kisses Kate while announcing to her erstwhile suitors: "pray be witness all of you; with this kiss / I choose him for my husband" (2.3.186–87).

Middleton raises the sexual stakes and erotic playfulness by advancing the narrative inexorably to the wedding night. He blatantly reminds spectators who might be unaware of its homoerotic implications that the relationship lacks sexual propriety. One of the neglected suitors asserts that:

Rich widows, that were wont to choose by gravity
 Their second husbands, not by tricks of blood,
 Are now so taken with loose Aretine⁵⁰ flames
 Of nimble wantonness and high-fed pride,
 They marry now but the third part of husbands,
 Boys, smooth-fac'd catamites, to fulfill their bed,
 As if a woman should a woman wed. (4.3.64–70)

On one hand, this speech flags Kate's illicit sexual position, one woman has wed another. It also prefigures a homosexual encounter, Kate has, after all, eagerly seduced the widow, and the play equivocates about how far she will take her disguise on the wedding night. On the other hand, Kate has already discredited the speaker, Sir Gilbert, and his derisive rant rings of his own defeat. Besides, one is apt to applaud Goldenfleece's choice—no matter how ironically. Kate is, after all, by far the most appealing of the widow's suitors. Therefore, although Sir Gilbert's remarks about female marriage offer

a pejorative assessment of female–female sex, his position in the text devalues his acerbic critique and the speech points out the erotic potential of Kate’s union without discrediting that possibility.

Ultimately, the play disrupts any taint of illicit sexuality when Kate rejects physical contact with her new wife on their wedding night:

Lady Goldenfleece: Now, like a greedy usurer alone, sum up all the wealth this day has brought me, And thus I hug it. [Embracing her.]

Mistress Low-water: Prithee!

Lady Goldenfleece: Thus, I kiss it. [Kissing her.]

Mistress Low-water: I can’t abide these kissings. (5.1.1–4)

Kate’s reprimand erupts into vicious reproach by the end of the scene, and the spectator’s sympathy shifts to Goldenfleece, who realizes that financial wealth can not succor emotional poverty: “I never knew what beggary was till now. / My wealth yields me no comfort in this plight; / Had want but brought me love, I’d happen’d right” (5.1.81–83).⁵¹ Although Goldenfleece has been an appropriate victim of Kate’s revenge, she is recuperated in the play’s final act, becoming the hero of a subplot by erasing concerns of incestuous pairings and arranging two happy couples. For her successful conversion, the text rewards Goldenfleece by joining her to Kate’s brother, Beveril.

In *The Homoerotics of Early Modern Drama*, Mario DiGangi has argued that the play allows female homoeroticism only as long as female desire transfers from female–female attraction to female–male attraction by the end of the play.⁵² Goldenfleece must shift her desire from Kate to an appropriate male object before the action concludes, and Beveril’s presence seems to provide a tidy heterosexual ending. Beveril, however, represents an exchange between two women who forge a new relationship not unlike the one Olivia carefully orchestrates at the end of *Twelfth Night*. Even before her wedding night rejection, Kate had determined that Goldenfleece should marry Beveril. The widow is not so much transferred to Beveril as she is embraced by a wider familial connection, which Middleton expresses in sentiments that resonate a homoerotic bond. Kate tells Goldenfleece:

You wish’d for love, and, faith, I have bestow’d you
Upon a gentleman that does dearly love you;
That recompense I’ve made you; and you must think, madam,
I lov’d you well, though I could never ease you,
When I fetch’d in my brother thus to please you. (5.2.366–70)

Kate may not be able to “please” Goldenfleece sexually, although her courtship was erotically satisfying, but she is responsible for the widow’s sexual pleasure by arranging the match with Beveril. In the last few lines of the play the women exchange oaths, Kate vows to be her servant and Goldenfleece pledges to be governed by Kate. The play ends not so much with transference from female homoerotic to heterosexual desire, but with a broader polymorphous bonding of individuals.

Not all seventeenth century uses of the cross-dressed heroine demonstrate the kind of innovations Middleton brought to the role and its ability to represent female homoeroticism. For example, the oft-recycled plot of *Twelfth Night* appears once more in *The Sisters*, a play by James Shirley written just before the theatres closed in the 1640s.⁵³ Produced after Charles I went to York to shore up support for his failing monarchy, *The Sisters* (1642) fell victim to unfortunate timing and neglect.⁵⁴ Despite the troubling events surrounding its production, *The Sisters* is essentially a conventional romantic comedy that contrasts reality with invention to establish an orderly society. Paulina and Angellina are the sisters of the title, and two siblings could not be more dissimilar. While Angellina is kind, reserved, rational, and headed for the convent, Paulina is severe, extravagant, foolish, and searching for a rich husband. Shirley provides these contradictory natures to demonstrate social difference and class affinity, for while Paulina’s family raised her as an heiress, she is not Angellina’s biological sister and cannot help displaying the coarseness of her common birth. One half of the plot comically exposes her affectations by means of a lively band of country rogues who assume various disguises.⁵⁵

The second half of the plot concerns the romantic intrigues surrounding Angellina. Pursued by both Lord Contarini and the prince of Parma, the virtuous Angellina finds herself inexplicably drawn to Vergerio, Contarini’s young page. In an echo of *Twelfth Night*, Vergerio is really Pulcheria, the Viceroy of Sicily’s daughter and Contarini’s neglected lover. Disguised as a Sicilian page, she traveled to Parma to test Contarini’s devotion and insinuated herself into his service. Like Orsino, Contarini sends Pulcheria to entreat Angellina for him, but here the play’s resemblance with *Twelfth Night* breaks down. The convention of Shakespeare’s plot and its cross-dressing heroine had grown so popular that to rehearse it without any innovation would have been stale, and Shirley uses the cross-dressed heroine without much complication. The audience is as ignorant of Pulcheria’s sex as the characters are, although Pulcheria’s discomfort with being chosen as a surrogate suitor, and her attempt to steer Angellina back

toward the convent by exposing Contarini's infidelity resonates a familiar narrative. Angellina does fall in love with Pulcheria, but has surprisingly little to say about the character's feminine charms and appeal, and their courtship is swift and decisive.

What Shirley does bring to his plot construct is Pulcheria's astute ability to use the situation to her own advantage. Successful in keeping Angellina away from Contarini, Pulcheria unintentionally attracts Angellina by her gallantry, offering to perform "Any service; / There's so much sweetness in you, I could lay / My life a sacrifice" (sig. D6v).⁵⁶ Transported by the comment, Angellina declares her love. Although Pulcheria argues that as a stranger she will be an unacceptable fiancé, she quickly relents: "Upon this white hand I breathe out my heart" (sig. D7). Shirley makes very little out of this relationship, however. In the end, Shirley unites Pulcheria with Contarini, and Angellina finds herself betrothed to the prince of Parma.⁵⁷ By the end of the play, false men as well as false nobility and false princes (the bandit Frapolo has impersonated Parma during the second half of the play) have been revealed and relegated to their proper places, providing the characters with an ordered society where noble men marry virtuous women and mete out compassionate justice for transgressions.⁵⁸ And yet, Pulcheria, like her cross-dressing comrades, has not been represented as a transgressor, nor is she punished in the play. No one admonishes or ridicules her behavior. On the contrary, in her minor role, Shirley rewards her with a noble husband. Like other disguised heroines in romantic comedies, Pulcheria is shrewd and sufficiently urbane to ingratiate herself with the men and women in her society, who regard her character as attractive rather than scandalous.

If Shirley found nothing original in the convention, Richard Brome, the author of *The Antipodes* certainly did. His city comedy, *A Madd Couple Well Matcht* (1639), brings significant innovations to scenarios of female homoerotic desire: this comedy even surpasses *Love's Riddle* by placing the cross-dressed heroine in erotic relations with three different women. The play, one of Brome's last, was written in about 1639 for Beeston's children's company to be performed at the private Cockpit theatre. The play was subsequently published along with four others in 1653, just after Brome's death. Brome, a protégé of Ben Jonson, wrote for several companies, including the King's Men at Blackfriars, between the 1620s and the closing of the theatres. While he was a popular playwright with acknowledged talent, he never achieved the critical fame some of his contemporaries enjoyed.⁵⁹

In *A Madd Couple Well Matcht*, Amie disguises herself as a man to become the steward of Lord Lovely, described in the cast list as

"a wencher," so she might "subsist / By the meere sight of" him and help him to reform (sig. G8v).⁶⁰ Amie and Lovely had a brief affair but he moved on to other conquests. Like a number of cross-dressed heroines, Amie's identity remains concealed until the last moments of the action; however, one editor argues that the play loses much of its appeal if the audience remains completely ignorant of the woman beneath the disguise and believes they must have been enlightened during the action, or that the play acquired a newly comic life from subsequent viewing.⁶¹ A spectator watching the play would initially enjoy the punch of comic surprise from Amie's disclosure and could then marvel at Brome's clever conceit during successive performances. Certainly without the revelation, Amie's exchanges with the loose city-wife Alicia, her courtship of the widow Crostill, and her private conference with Lady Thriwell sacrifice layers of comic intricacy and intrigue.

Amie's first homoerotic encounter is with Alicia Saleware, the adulterous wife of a London merchant. In her guise as the steward Bellamy ("belle Amie"), Lovely sends her to arrange a tryst for him with Alicia, but Amie uses the opportunity to press her own suit: "While I doe service to my Lord/. . ./I finde my selfe a Traytor to his trust, / In my negotiation for my selfe" (sig. C4v). Amie presents herself as an alternate choice to keep Lovely away from other women only to become tangled in her own intrigue when Alicia aggressively pursues her. "Pray leave your Player-like passionate expressions," she demands, kissing Amie, and "speake plainly what you would have mee doe, or what you would doe with mee" (sig. C5v). Brome, contrasting sentiment and romance with cynical sexuality, plays Amie's delaying tactics against Alicia's easy amorality for comic affect. In the end, Amie agrees to sleep with Alicia, but also consents to an adulterous plot to make love to Lady Thriwell.

Amie's relationship with Lady Thriwell is complex. In disguise, Amie resembles her brother, who previously had an affair with Lady Thriwell. So, when this "handsome youth" (sig. C3v) appears, the lady is surprised to find "this beard-lesse Bellamie" (sig. C4) rather than her Fitzgerrard. However, Alicia notices her interest in the youth and seeks revenge against the Thriwells on another matter by persuading Bellamy to sleep with Lady Thriwell and then planning to expose the woman's adultery. Brome manipulates events so that several other characters believe Lady Thriwell not only loves, but has also slept with Bellamy. In an ironic twist, Amie even gives false report against herself. To an audience aware of Amie's disguise, multiple erotic connotations emerge from the exchange, including ribald and provocative references to a female-female sexual encounter.

Alicia: Once more your story, for I am not satisfied with thrice being told it.

Bellamy: Can a Woman take so much delight in hearing another Womans pleasure taken?

Alicia: As it was given by you I can, for I am prepar'd by it to take pleasure from you, and shall with greedinesse expect it till I have it.

Bellamy: Then know I pleas'd her so, that shee protested, (and I believe her) her Husband never pleas'd her so. (sig. E4v)

Amie boasts of their multiple orgasms, weaving a fiction of erotic delight. But, even more startling, Brome structures the scene so that it appears as if Amie might have actually slept with Lady Thrivewell to conceal her identity. The two women are reported in "private conference" for an hour without "so much as Matron Nurse in the roome" (sig. D7). When Amie brags of her amorous conquest upon the heels of this evidence, the assumption is that she has made love to Lady Thrivewell to maintain her disguise. The joke that Lady Thrivewell "protested . . . her Husband never pleas'd her so" and Amie's easy assurance of that fact, embed the scene with homoerotic imagery. Brome deftly manages the text to be both ambiguous and suggestive.

Amie, now more comfortably in control of events, begins to manipulate Alicia, telling her that while making love to Lady Thrivewell she had Alicia "still in my imagination" (sig. E5). Alicia kisses her again, and they agree to meet the following night. However, Amie exploits Alicia's lust and ensures that Alicia's husband interrupts them and becomes aware of his wife's adultery. One of the play's jokes is that while three separate women pursue the reserved Bellamy, none desire her for herself. Alicia, although unopposed to enjoying the young steward, only uses her as a pawn of her revenge; Lady Thrivewell believes she is someone else; and Crostill uses her to bait the widow-hunting Carelesse.

Crostill, a conventional widow character, exists in the play primarily as a reward for the reprobate Carelesse.⁶² Lovely, hunting the widow himself, humorously proffers Amie as a perfect lover and new husband. Disguised as Bellamy, she might lack masculine "boldnesse" but Carelesse assures the widow that she possesses "love and sweetnesse" (sig. E7). Lovely also notes Amie's "long, middle finger," a physical attribute that, along with "thin Jawes, and Roman Nose, / Are never fayling signes of Widowes joyes" (sig. E7). In this case, the long, middle finger refers to the male sexual organ and stands as a substitute phallus at the disposal of both men and women. For any spectators who are aware that Amie is a woman, Brome's language capitalizes on the homoerotic possibilities of a "long, middle finger" as a sexual tool

between women for both penetration and clitoral stimulation. However, Amie's assurance that "my own demerit / Curbs my ambition more than love emboldens" (sig. F1), moves the widow more than Lovely's bawdy guarantees and Crostill sets Amie as a rival against Carelesse.

Strikingly, Brome does not resolve the homoerotic energy by placing his cross-dressed heroine in a heterosexual union at the end of the play when Amie reveals her disguise and appears in women's clothes with her uncle, who set her up as a "Go-between" for Lovely and his mistresses (sig. G8v). She agreed to the charade to be "in the presence of" her "loved Lord" (sig. C8v), and convention in romantic comedy would hold that she and Lovely marry—they have, after all, already slept together. Instead, Amie vows to live a life of "chastity" (sig. H1), which may suggest, since Lovely promises a generous annuity to help her find a husband, that she plans a settled, more conventional existence. Alternately, perhaps Amie rejects the institution of marriage by invoking "chastity." The play gives her cause: the two unions it depicts are adulterous and near collapse while the weddings at its conclusion hold little promise.⁶³ Or, having observed Lovely's behavior, Amie may simply reject the idea of marriage to him. However, Amie's character is enigmatic, her thoughts and reactions indistinct. Brome does not reveal why she chooses "chastity" over Lovely, or how she feels about her various female liaisons. While the male characters believe that women sexually together make a "flat bargain," that is, lack a phallus for sexual intercourse (sig. G8v), one has to wonder if Amie rejects heterosexual conventions for homoerotic pleasures. After all, throughout the play she has been heterosexually chaste but homoerotically amorous and Brome leaves her uncoupled and financially independent—an unconventional and transgressive figure.

As a city comedy, Brome's play constructs situations that are sexual rather than sentimental, and the homoerotic scenarios in the play are more prurient and cynical than homoerotics in romantic comedies. This carnality is true of city comedy in general. While plays like *Anything for a Quiet Life*, *The Widdow*, and *No Wit, No Help Like a Woman's* direct their audiences to imagine sexual encounters between women—Sib telling Knaves-bee and Beaufort that she and Mrs. Cressingham "lay together in bed," Brandino's contemplation of his wife and Martia lying together with their tongues "wagging," Sir Gilbert's critique that "a woman should a woman wed," and Amie's boast of her lovemaking with Lady Thrivewell—romantic comedies focus on homoerotic desire and female-female affection. *Twelfth Night*, *As You Like It*, *James IV*, and *Love's Riddle* construct scenarios in which a female character desires the cross-dressed heroine, but avoid sexual references

to that relationship. These pastoral plays construct homoerotic scenarios around emotion—desire and affection—rather than sexual union.

Further, Brome's play advances the convention of the cross-dressed heroine to its most playfully homoerotic position just before the theatres close in 1642. From the early, brief engagement of Neronis in *Clyomon and Clamydes*, gamely anticipating the potential of her disguise, the cross-dressed heroine in comedy evolved into an elaborate complex character used by writers to juggle multiple plot strands and was situated in a variety of homoerotic encounters with women. In *A Maddr Couple Well Matchd*, Brome's Amie deftly manages adulterous wives, lustful widows, and respectable ladies. Amie's breezy description of the sexual pleasure she gave Lady Thrivewell, her acceptance of Alicia's kisses, and the ambiguity of her sexual interests at the end of the play seem a natural culmination for the cross-dressed heroine. Women like Greene's Dorothea have already countenanced homoerotic flirtation, Cowley's Callidora has played the willing lover of two mistresses, and Middleton's Kate has aggressively pursued another woman, although all these characters are ultimately united with male partners. Brome circumvents dramatic precedent when Amie emphatically rejects marriage and therefore conventional heterosexuality, and his cloak of circumspection leaves the character open to interpretations of homoerotic proclivities.

Finally, one important trait shared by comedies throughout this chapter is the ability to provide their female couples with alternate relationships that promise to continue female–female erotic unions, even as they restrict female sexuality to heterosexual practice. Brome exploits the sexual transgression of his character by refusing to contain her within acceptable confines of marriage. Dorothea, in *James IV* tells Lady Anderson that she has “won a friend / That loves thee as her life,” and Callidora asks the dejected Bellula for her “friendship” in *Love's Riddle*. By the end of Middleton's *Anything for a Quiet Life*, Mrs. Cressingham and Sib collaborate against the men harassing them. And, in both Middleton's *No Wit, No Help Like a Woman's* and Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, women arrange familial connections with other women through heterosexual marriages: in the former Kate ensures that Lady Goldenfleece marries her brother, and in the latter Olivia orchestrates the double wedding that will make her Viola's sister-in-law. Homosocial bonding very often replaces homoerotic desire in these texts, continuing, if somewhat muting, the playfully erotic connections between women.

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CHAPTER 3



ANXIOUSLY EMERGENT LESBIAN EROTICS

As chapter 2 demonstrated, early modern playwrights used cross-dressing as a convenient strategy when presenting images of female homoeroticism in drama. However, some scholars dismiss the cross-dressed character as a site of homoerotic investment. In his influential text, *Sodometries*, Jonathan Goldberg argued that homosexuality is not located in dramatic transvestism since homosexual tendencies are not acquired merely by a character's appropriation of opposite-gender clothing. Goldberg proposes that models of friendship and the discourse on sodomy are more useful sites of investigation—that Marlowe's *Edward II* has more to offer than *As You Like It* or *Twelfth Night*, or at least that one should focus critical attention on the relationship of Rosalind and Celia rather than Rosalind and Phebe.¹ If one looks for sexual identities, then Goldberg is correct; however, if one investigates sexual representations a broader field of inquiry emerges than Goldberg's theory suggests. For, while early modern playwrights did construct characters who might be considered to have a homosexual inclination like Emilia in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, they more often represented homoerotic desires or homoerotic tensions between characters without being constrained by peremptory qualifications of a character's sexual identity. As argued in the previous chapters, cross-dressing became a conventional narrative device employed by playwrights to represent scenarios of female same-sex desire without encountering censure.² In scenes involving two heterosexual female characters, playwrights could graft scenes of same-sex attraction filtered through the disguise of a cross-dressed female

character. These writers used tropes of female homoerotic attraction to depict representations of female–female desire in their plays without presenting characters that were themselves homosexually inclined.

In romantic comedy, the sexual attraction of one woman for another, predicated on false sartorial significations of male gender, provided homoerotically charged comedy that an audience could laughingly excuse as mistaken or misdirected desire. Cross-dressing remained a dramaturgical device for representing female homoerotics until the mid-seventeenth century when Parliament suspended theatrical activity in England. However, by the early seventeenth century, playwrights incorporated homoerotic scenarios in the newly popular tragicomedies and in tragedies, but with marked differences from the homoerotic constructions in comedies. In tragedy and tragicomedy, playwrights are both more explicit and more anxious in their representations of female homoerotic imagery. These plays go far beyond the hesitant and abortive same-sex attractions explored in comedies by Shakespeare and his contemporaries.

This chapter focuses on seven texts to examine the narrative strategies playwrights employed in tragedies and tragicomedies to foreground the sexual tension in the homoerotic encounters of their female characters. The stylistic shift from comedy to tragicomedy and tragedy allowed playwrights the opportunity to explore the dramatic potential of female homoerotic desire in scenarios that comic expectations could never support. Section I of this chapter looks at Beaumont and Fletcher's *Philaster* and Samuel Daniel's pastoral tragicomedy *Hymen's Triumph*, which concludes the action not with the traditional promise of marriage, but with the desiring subject's discomfiture and humiliation over her homoerotic inclination. Section II examines John Ford's *The Lover's Melancholy*, James Shirley's *The Doubtful Heir*, and Sir John Suckling's *Brennoralt*. The first two are tragicomedies that heighten the level of anxiety surrounding homoerotic desire, while *Brennoralt* is a tragedy of unrequited love and political strife. Section III explores two tragedies, Robert Daborne's *A Christian Turn'd Turk* and Leonard Willan's *Orgula*, both of which present morally depraved desiring subjects whose sexual transgressions are characteristic of their immorality.

This chapter focuses on tragedies and tragicomedies because they display a level of erotic exchange between women not found in romantic comedies. Non-comic genres allow playwrights to explore anxieties within female homoerotic constructs. Bruce Smith warns that different genres maintain conventions for presenting desire onstage and argues that tragedy, comedy, and tragicomedy present

distinct and contrary representations of homoerotic attractions.³ Smith argues that while tragedy and satiric comedy condemn or ridicule male homosexual desires, romantic comedy and tragicomedies with a comic bent provide a more advantageous site for the presentation of such desires. In the case of female homoerotics, genre counts, as the shift in style from comedy to tragicomedy and tragedy affords serious dramatic explorations that are more erotically complex than situations encountered in comedic scenarios.

Valerie Traub has argued that a conceptual shift regarding female homoerotics occurred during the mid-seventeenth century, from the tacit acceptance of an “impossible” desire to the suspicion of immorality.⁴ I argue that female homoerotics were always suspect and that in the sixteenth century playwrights obscured such representations with the figure of the cross-dressed romantic heroine to make them more acceptable to audiences. As female homoerotics appear more frequently in the newly popular tragicomedies and in tragedies during the early seventeenth century, same-sex attraction emerges in serious dramatic contexts with a resultant anxiety accruing to the desire. Public sentiment toward female same-sex desire did not shift in the seventeenth century so much as dramatic literature expanded to embrace multiple classifications of homoerotic attraction.

In fact, comic representations, such as Abraham Cowley’s *Love’s Riddle*, and sympathetic depictions, like the one examined in chapter 5 in Lodowick Carlell’s *The Passionate Lovers*, continue to appear close to mid-century. Both plays indicate an indulgent attitude toward representations of female homoeroticism. As noted in chapter 2, Cowley’s play echoes *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*, which were written three decades earlier. His romantic comedy revolves around Callidora, who escapes an unwanted marriage by retreating in male disguise to the nearby forest where two shepherdesses fall in love with her. Cowley’s Callidora, unlike her Shakespearean counterparts, revels in the female attraction she inspires. Carlell’s *The Passionate Lovers* presents a scene in which one female character asserts her continuing desire for a no-longer-cross-dressed-heroine whom she previously loved as a man. Carlell’s Olinda demonstrates an inclination toward same-sex attachments that the playwright presents as a component of romantic love. Although the chronological argument demands attention, it must be combined with a careful examination of how different genres affected the representation of female homoerotic desire. Tragicomedy and tragedy allowed for serious explorations of female homoerotics and insinuated an apprehension with same-sex desire, while comedy as well as certain tragicomedies maintained a tolerant approach.

The various tragedies and tragicomedies examined in this chapter further trouble the chronological argument; for by the beginning of the seventeenth century playwrights already demonstrated anxiety about homoerotic passions between women. Both *Hymen's Triumph* and *A Christian Turn'd Turk*, which appeared before 1615, exhibit apprehension or obvious condemnation of homoerotic attractions. As the seventeenth century advanced, playwrights became more direct about exploring female homoeroticism than they had earlier in romantic comedies, but that exploration in tragedy and tragicomedy produced an eroticism fraught with misgiving. By heightening the eroticism of female–female encounters and dramatizing homoerotic passions after the sex of the disguised heroine has been revealed, *The Lover's Melancholy*, *The Doubtful Heir*, and *Brennoralt* suggest the dangerous effects of homoerotic desires. Mid-century plays like *Brennoralt* and Willan's *Orgula* drive their message about the peril of homoerotic attractions home by sentencing their homoerotically inclined heroines to madness and death. However, these plays existed concurrently with romances and pastoral comedies like *Love's Riddle* and *The Passionate Lovers*, which celebrate women's homoerotic attachments. Benign presentations of female homoeroticism continued well into the 1600s, while tragedy and tragicomedy explored its more anxious manifestations fairly early in the century. The representation of female homoeroticism in early modern drama does not develop in a rigid chronology from the acceptance of an impossible desire to the fear of immoral practice.

Tragicomedy sprang into popularity on the English stage in the 1610s. At a time when drama in general focused on sexual themes, tragicomedy specifically explored the anxieties inherent in sexual desire. In fact, R. A. Foakes identifies the treatment of sexuality as the most distinguishable feature of the tragicomic form.⁵ Using Foakes to analyze Fletcherian tragicomedy, Verna A. Foster argues that the tragic potential of the genre required a disturbing or problematic sexual experience. She maintains that representations of proscribed sexual behaviors indicated larger social or moral aberrations in a narrative.⁶ Although Foster does not address homoerotic desire in her article, it is unfortunately not surprising that early modern playwrights conflated that passion with representations of adultery, incest, rape, sexual jealousy, and impotence—staple motifs in tragicomedy. What Bruce Smith calls the “indeterminacy” of tragicomedy is the quality that allows these plays to engage questions of unorthodox sexuality in a serious framework and raise anxiety without descending into the more overt condemnations found in the tragedies.⁷ Furthermore,

tragicomedy could entertain topics excluded from romantic comedy. Secured by a structure that required a happy resolution, Jacobean and Caroline playwrights were free to explore the covert erotic impulses of their characters without explicitly condemning them.⁸

As a form associated primarily with the private theatres, tragicomedy appealed to the tastes of a patrician crowd. Tragicomedy supplied the circumstances to create new intellectual, emotional, and sexual images sought by an audience eager for novelty and originality.⁹ Rather than the light humor of romantic comedy or the satiric farce of city comedy, tragicomedy provided a genre where playwrights could explore the homoerotic potential of erotic tensions between women for an audience fully aware of theatrical conventions and artifice. The King's Men presented most of the plays discussed below between the years 1608 and 1642. Only Willan's *Orgula* was never acted. Daniel wrote his play specifically for a court performance, although it did not end up in the repertoire of the King's Men. The representations of sexual desires between female characters, the suggestions of homoerotic impulses, would not be lost on an audience familiar with the story of Iphis and Ianthé, Ide and Olive, Philoclea and Zelmané, and Donne's Sappho and Philaenis.

I PHILASTER AND SAMUEL DANIEL'S HYMEN'S TRIUMPH

Philaster presents a cross-dressed heroine whose type reappears in the plays in this chapter. This figure has little in common with characters like the presumptuous swaggering Kate of Thomas Middleton's *No Wit, No Help Like a Woman's* or Shakespeare's adventurous Viola and Rosalind. Rather she represents what Michael Shapiro calls the "frail waif." According to Shapiro, this character often remains marginal to the main action of a story and was popular in plays that borrowed from the conventions of romance literature.¹⁰ Powerful men often assume a position of guardianship over this character and may be either responsible for her disguise or completely unaware of her sexual identity. The "frail waif" takes on a male disguise for protection, but, unlike similar characters in comedies, her experience of cross-dressing fails to liberate her. Rather, events buffet this character type beyond her control and she experiences an elevated sense of anxiety because of her disguise. When the cross-dressed heroine encounters a desiring woman, she suffers emotional discomfort and rejects homoerotic passions.

Euphrasia in *Philaster* (1608–10) is an early example of the character type. Disguised as Bellario, she becomes the forlorn victim in a sexually

charged triangle between Philaster and the Princess Arathusa. The lurid description Philaster paints when he accuses Euphrasia of sleeping with Arathusa places Euphrasia in an eroticized context with the princess. However, mutual affection rather than anxiety characterizes the relationship between the women. Even when Arathusa believes Euphrasia has spread the sexual rumors about them, the princess displays anguish rather than anger at the supposed betrayal. Beaumont and Fletcher use the moment to suggest a strong affectional attachment between the women when Arathusa, moved by Euphrasia's departing speech, admits to the empty room that "if I had another Troy to lose, / Thou, or another villaine with thy lookes, / Might talke me out of it, and send me naked / My haire dishevel'd through the fiery streetes" (sig. G3).¹¹ Arathusa's sexually charged language only at this instant indicates her erotic attraction to Euphrasia, otherwise her affection remains kind rather than aggressive. Euphrasia exhibits no discomfort around the princess and ultimately determines to become one of Arathusa's serving women rather than accept a dowry from the king so that she may marry any man she chooses. Euphrasia represents the retiring virgin—a character type who, when placed with a sexually demanding woman in the plays discussed later, recoils at the prospect of being seduced by a member of her own sex.

In the plays of this chapter, anxiety is displayed most strongly not by the disguised heroine, but by the desiring subject when she learns the object of her affection is another woman. The last of Samuel Daniel's four plays provides an example. Queen Anne commissioned the pastoral tragicomedy *Hymen's Triumph*, which was performed at Somerset House in the Strand during the wedding of Lord and Lady Roxborough in February 1614.¹² The action of this scrupulously organized cross-dressing plot concerns Silvia, who is thought dead after having escaped an unwanted marriage. She disguises herself as Clarindo and her rival, Cloris, sends her as a mediator to win the affections of Thyrsis, Silvia's own true love. A second triangulated relationship supports this main plot. The nymph Phillis, spurning the rugged and jealous Montanus, falls in love with the disguised Silvia, who does her best to discourage the attraction. After complications, intrigues, reversals, and discoveries, Silvia reunites with Thyrsis, and Arcadia joins together in celebration.

However, the play avoids the conventional comic ending of nuptial revelry and replaces it with a scene of abject alienation, in which Phillis's ever pragmatic nurse Lidia attempts to pacify Phillis and Cloris. Both women fear social ridicule, the former for loving a woman and the latter for using her rival to negotiate with Thyrsis. Phillis,

whose lines illustrate the anxiety caused by a homoerotic attraction, feels “utterly sham’d,” wonders how she can ever look Silvia in the face after having desired her, and recoils at the prospect of public derision for having behaved so “grossly” (5.2.1860–64).¹³ The dialogue in this scene expresses what has been left unspoken in previous romantic comedies—the emotional confusion and distress of the desiring subject. Daniel focuses the play’s ending not on traditional marriage, but on the reactions of disenfranchised characters.¹⁴ Lidia advises Phillis to feign nonchalance and admit that she knew Silvia was a woman all along. After all, Phillis’s notorious disdain of men demonstrates a natural attraction to women:

Lidia: say thus: how yo^w
 knew well enough it was no man whom yo^w
 affected so, who never could love man
 nor ever would, & that by meere [instinct]¹⁵
 and sympathie of Sex, yo^w fancied him [the disguised Silvia].
 (5.2.1869–73)

However, Phillis is too ashamed to gloss her desire as credible or appropriate and rejects Lidia’s suggestion as impossible to affect: “That shall I never doo, but ever blush / at her, to thinke what she will thinke of me / who did bewray my selfe so foolishlie” (5.2.1875–77). The play concludes not with social harmony over the impending marriage of Silvia and Thyrsis, but with Lidia exhorting the agitated Phillis and Cloris to assume a jovial insouciance they do not feel as their only means of acceptance into the celebratory Arcadian society.¹⁶

II *THE LOVER’S MELANCHOLY,* *THE DOUBTFUL HEIR, BRENNORALT*

When tragicomedies combine Shapiro’s “frail waif” with a shocked and regretful desiring female subject like Daniel’s Phillis, the anxiety over female homoerotic desire intensifies both on stage and presumably in the audience, which is demonstrated in the plays by John Ford and James Shirley. Ford’s *The Lover’s Melancholy*, performed in 1628 by the King’s Men and published a year later, is the earliest of the three plays in this section. Ford wrote the text himself, and it was the first of his independently written dramas to be printed.¹⁷ In this tragicomedy, Ford places the cross-dressed heroine in a dramatic scenario rather than a comic situation. The text reveals Ford’s ambition to advance thematic limits explored by his predecessors.

Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy* influenced much of the text, reflecting Ford's interest in topical subject matter.¹⁸ Interestingly, a section of Burton's commentary identifies homoerotic desire and sexual practices between women within an inventory of what he considers crippling sexual dysfunctions, along with sodomy, bestiality, masturbation, sadism, prostitution, and necrophilia (3.2.1.2). Burton's brief account of a woman who disguised herself in male attire in order to pursue and marry another woman (reminiscent of the stories in Montaigne and Estienne) possibly influenced Ford's decision to construct a homoerotic scenario in a play about psychosexual maladies.¹⁹ Ford's use of taboo topics and exotic themes was an attempt to reinvigorate an inherited dramatic aesthetic nearly exhausted by the great playwrights of a previous generation and fulfill his audience's expectations for the sensational.²⁰

The action of the play concerns the dysfunctional state of Cyprus under the melancholic Palador, whose ennui issues from the loss of his great love Eroclea. Eroclea, the text's heroine and frail waif, fled Cyprus in male disguise when Palador's father attempted to rape her. The play opens when Eroclea, disguised as Parthenophill, returns to court. As Ford slowly reveals Eroclea's identity to the audience, he also entangles her in homoerotic attractions.²¹ In a wonderful counterpoint, first the maid Kala and then her mistress Thamasta try to seduce Eroclea.²² Kala's indignation at eventually being rejected by Eroclea erupts with comic spite: she calls Eroclea a "gelding" behind her back, "a green-sickness-livered boy," and laments, "my maiden-head will shortly grow so stale / That 'twill be mouldy" (3.2.17–19).²³ Before she exits the scene, Kala grumbles that Eroclea might have at least "proffered kindness in a corner." This scene reminds Ford's audience of the conventional comic potential inherent in scenes between a cross-dressed heroine and a desiring female character.

In contrast to the coarse humor of Eroclea's encounter with Kala, a dramatic intensity unusual in representations of female homoeroticism dominates the scene between Eroclea and Thamasta. The action becomes more serious by its juxtaposition with the comic seduction that precedes it.²⁴ Thamasta arranges for Eroclea to meet her privately in her chambers, the intimacy emphasizing the erotic potential of the scene. At first, Eroclea pretends not to understand Thamasta's overt declaration of love; next, she pleads her own inadequacies; and finally she tries to turn Thamasta's attention to Menaphon, a rejected lover. Eroclea's desperately shifting arguments display her own anxiety at being the object of another woman's passion and also reveal the attendant risk to her disguise. Unlike Kala's comic pique when Eroclea

rejects her, Thamasta displays an earnest pathos in the face of Eroclea's hesitation that Ford explores in psychological, if somewhat melodramatic, depth.

In this lengthy scene, Ford tightens the sexual tension as Thamasta begins an oath renouncing all future lovers, which horrifies Eroclea. The tense exchange builds to a fevered pitch until our disguised heroine reveals that she is a woman. Ford then fills the scene with romantic verse as Eroclea explains to Thamasta that, "Cupid has broke / his arrows here and, like a child unarmed, / Comes to make sport between us with no weapon / But feathers stolen from his mother's doves" (3.2.156–59). This argument, which asserts a phallic primacy and implies that female–female sexual encounters might be tender but ultimately lack fulfillment, is opposed by the erotic tension of the exchange. Moreover, the gentle consolation, with its amorous rhetoric, deviates from conventional cross-dressing scenarios of manly bravado or comic avoidance. The tone of the scene is erotic, tense, and acutely serious. By placing this scene of a desiring female subject enamored of a disguised heroine within the structure of a tragicomedy, Ford disrupts the comic expectations of his audience. He revitalizes a familiar convention through the disjunction of form to represent an anxious homoerotic seduction.

When finally convinced of Eroclea's sex, Thamasta becomes embarrassed and asks Eroclea to "conceal the errors of my passions" (3.2.173–74).²⁵ Thamasta's remarks imply that a certain cultural danger attends homoerotic desires. What follows that remark, however, is an unusual exchange that offers an alternative to the comic intrigue, sentimental pity, and prurient sexual interest of early romances and later city comedies. Thamasta tells Eroclea that although she knows Eroclea is a woman, she still finds Eroclea desirable and asks her indulgence.

Thamasta: It will be

A hard task for my reason to relinquish
The affection which was once devoted thine;
I shall awhile repute thee still the youth
I loved so dearly. (3.2.176–80)

Eroclea responds gallantly by saying that she will remain Thamasta's "ready faithful servant" and agrees to stay longer in Thamasta's chamber rather than have her new "unworthiness alter" Thamasta's "good opinion" of her (3.2.181–83). Thamasta admits she will be "jealous" (3.2.185) seeing Eroclea with others.

Ford's scene depicts a more complicated emotional reaction than the earlier comedies where playwrights divert women's affections to the nearest male character when the cross-dressed heroine is revealed.²⁶ In fairness, of course, those revelations often come in large group scenes that suggest the hesitation of the desiring subject, (both Hylace and Bellula waver briefly when confronted with the female Callidora), but in which any overt declaration would open the character to general scorn (and both accept male partners they do not love). Here, Thamasta understands the ridicule to which she would be subjected and begs Eroclea's secrecy. Ford uses the serious trappings of tragicomedy and places Thamasta in this intimate scene to express her emotions, and the audience sees not only her realistic confusion and embarrassment but also her conscious expression of a homoerotic attraction. This level of understanding and compassion, as well as the complexity Ford brings to homoerotic representations is refreshing in a convention much used but not fully explored in the previous decades. As a derivative form, tragicomedy amplifies the range of emotional and erotic subjects handled in antecedent comedies. Using tragicomedy, Ford expands the static approach to the homoerotic potential of the cross-dressed heroine and introduces a psychological depth to same-sex attraction only comically envisioned by Shakespeare and his contemporaries.²⁷ The genre of tragicomedy allows space for more openly subversive views than the genre of comedy. Thus, Ford reveals himself as a true innovator, not a mere sensation-monger. His iconoclastic approach to erotic attraction "challenges conventional morality," which suggests that far from ridiculing female homoerotic desires, Ford merely exposed the comic ridicule and troubling anxiety to critique it, offering instead an alternate moral judgement.²⁸

In 1638, a decade after Ford's *The Lover's Melancholy*, James Shirley's *The Doubtful Heir* was performed at Blackfriar's just before Parliament closed the playhouses.²⁹ The text did not see publication until 1652. Shirley wrote the piece for Ogilby's Men during his time in Ireland at Dublin's Werburgh Street Theatre. Female homoerotic desire appears with some regularity in Shirley's plays, for it occurs variously in *The Arcadia*, *The Sisters*, *The Bird in a Cage*, and in this play. While Shirley unimaginatively constructed images of female-female desire in his romantic comedy *The Sisters*, he found greater potential for creativity in tragicomedy. Unlike Shirley's earlier play, *The Doubtful Heir* foregrounds a candid, although interrupted, homoerotic seduction. In this tragicomedy, Shirley exploited language and traditional gender assumptions to construct a conversation that features an explicit same-sex dialogue.

The Doubtful Heir is a tightly plotted drama in which Olivia, the supposed queen of Murcia, occupies the throne in place of Ferdinand, the rightful king. Ferdinand marries Olivia, although he is already betrothed to the play's heroine Rosania, who accompanies him disguised as a page. Shirley manipulates this sexual triangle to titillate his audience, for Ferdinand, who has only married Olivia to escape execution, refuses to consummate their union. In frustration, Olivia turns to the disguised Rosania, upon whom Ferdinand has lavished a more than common affection, planning to incite her husband's jealousy by seducing his young servant.³⁰

The first half of *The Doubtful Heir* follows Eve Sedgwick's model of the master narrative—a male–female–male relationship—by placing Olivia between two male suitors, Ferdinand and Leonario, the prince of Arragon. By act 3, the play has introduced a second female subject into that equation—Rosania—creating what Terry Castle calls a “lesbian counterplot” in which Rosania and Olivia become erotically connected through Ferdinand.³¹ When the love plot becomes triangulated between two women and a subjugated male mediator, it disrupts the male homosociality of the traditional master narrative, and constructs a new female homosocial narrative in its place. In this case, unlike many other cross-dressing scenarios, Olivia does not initially find the disguised Rosania attractive, hardly taking note of her except as the perfect object to revenge herself upon Ferdinand; however, she pursues a more aggressive seduction than is typical in scenes with cross-dressed heroines. While Shirley uses tragicomedy to construct one of the most overt homoerotic dialogues between women, he also seems careful to signify the heterosexuality of his desiring subject by qualifying her pursuit of Rosania as a jealous plot to gain the affection of her husband. Like comic playwrights, Shirley moderates the homoerotic scenario even as he expands its potential through the genre of tragicomedy.

In act 3, knowing that Ferdinand watches, Olivia, as the stage directions indicate, “is pleasant with Ros[ania]” (sig. D2v), smiling at her, playing with her hair, and stroking her cheek.³² By act 4 Olivia has orchestrated a late-night assignation in her bedchamber with the perplexed Rosania. Shirley arouses a prurient expectation in that encounter by having Ferdinand and Rosania discuss the event before it occurs. Ferdinand encourages Rosania to “be free in amorous language,” to “kiss” Olivia, “and promise what young lovers doe” (sig. D6v) while still concealing her identity. As with *The Lover's Melancholy*, this scene of homoerotic seduction starts out conventionally. Olivia confronts a reluctant cross-dressed Rosania, who modestly

attempts to deflect Olivia's attentions. Shirley quickly abandons the traditional disguised heroine motif, however, when Olivia shifts gender positions by taking the male role in the seduction—literally. Kissing Rosania's hand, she says:

Olivia: This is a happiness that Kings should sue for,
 And yet there are poor comforts in these Kisses;
 Let hands preserve Societie with hands,
 And with their change of whiteness, and of Balm,
 Make wealthy one another: But let what
 Was mean't for kisses meet, and finde out pleasure
 By warm exchange of souls from our soft lips. Kisses.
 Madam, how like you this?

Rosania: Madam.

Olivia: I suppose you a Lady all this while,
 And I the man, our lips must meet again,
 Will this instruct thee nothing?

Rosania: Gracious Madam.

Olivia: And yet this recreation comes short,
 Dear Lady, of what love might well allow us. (sig. E1–E1v)

This scene uses language in an exceptional manner. Olivia's assertion about appropriate gendered behavior allows Shirley to manipulate the pronouns in the exchange so that Olivia directs her dialogue to another woman rather than a supposedly male subject. Cross-dressed scenes of female homoerotics usually retain an ambiguity, in that the desiring subject perceives, and talks to, the transvestite character as if she were male. Those scenes allow an imaginative, but safe, homoerotic scenario since the audience knows that both characters are women while the transvestism means the dialogue remains heterosexually constructed. Here, Shirley finds a way to circumvent the heterosexual dialogue and allow Olivia's discourse to present the reality of the scene—a woman aggressively seducing another woman. With the audience fully aware that Rosania is a female, Shirley devises a way for the dialogue to represent a highly charged, explicitly erotic exchange between two subject positions verbally signified as female. Not only does Olivia direct her dialogue to the figure of another woman, but her language also reflects that reality.³³

The level of physical engagement in this scene also demonstrates tragicomedy's ability to extend conventional constructions of female homoeroticism. The dialogue implies that Olivia caresses Rosania and the stage directions call for Olivia to kiss her several times, acting out the gestures of Ferdinand's erotic imagination. In Celia Daileader's analysis

of the material absence of sex on the early modern stage—its banishment offstage like acts of physical violence in ancient Greek theatre—she mentions the heightened significance of onstage actions.³⁴ The explicit stage direction in this scene, which dictates that Olivia should kiss Rosania, constitutes an infrequent, embodied instance of sexual action. According to Daileader, plays more commonly professed, imagined, or rhetorically signified such gestures. When Olivia kisses Rosania, the rarity of the stage action—compounded by the homosexual construct of Olivia's erotic query, "Madam, how like you this"—is startling. The repetition of Olivia's lips seeking Rosania's saturates the scene in a carnal intimacy tinged with depravity, for Rosania is the unwilling object of Olivia's sexual attention: she is compelled to accept such unwanted advances by her male lover Ferdinand. Shirley's homoerotic construction derives from the female page convention, but he amplifies the erotic potential in tragicomedy through an original use of language and physicality.

As the scene progresses, Olivia demands that they change into each other's clothes so that their sartorial arrangement duplicates their gendered behaviors and "act" the episode again (sig. Elv). Olivia's suggestions of sexual role-playing, her physical aggression, and Ferdinand's pressure for Rosania to encourage Olivia's behavior all heighten the sexual anxiety and aberrance in this scene. Ferdinand and other courtiers interrupt Olivia in the throes of her seduction as she incites Rosania to "love me, and compose thy heart to mine, / Wee'l live with more delight, than fancie can / Inrich Elizium with. The soft hours shall stay / Till we allow 'em Wings, and while we kiss / And on each others Lips breath Incense thus, / Wee'l have ten thousand Cupids for our guard" (sig. E2). In quick succession, the men accuse Olivia of adultery; Rosania reveals her identity; and she and Ferdinand are imprisoned. Olivia declares that she knew all along Rosania was a woman and used the seduction to expose her, asserting that the men's timely entrance "prevent[ed] further acts of shame" (sig. E4). Olivia's protestation, similar to Thamasta's apology for her "errors" with Eroclea and Phillis's embarrassment about Silvia, signals the social contempt and derision focused on female homoerotic desire. Making love to another woman is shameful. Neither Olivia, Thamasta, nor Phillis want to be accused of non-normative sexual behaviors or interests. In the end, Ford and Shirley attach their desiring subjects to male lovers, their homoerotic attractions rendered both ambiguous and temporary. At the same time, however, both playwrights focus considerable portions of their texts on the construction of female homoerotic scenarios.

Sir John Suckling's *Brennoralt* is the latest of the three plays in this section. The title appears in a 1641 list of scripts belonging to the King's Men and after the Restoration the production was actively revived.³⁵ The text, printed in 1646, resurfaced regularly in the frequent, successive editions of Suckling's writing. Suckling borrowed the romantic plot line from Jean Pierre Camus's 1625 French romance *L'Iphigene*, but the political sentiments are his own.³⁶ Several critics, including Martin Butler, believed that the play reflects Suckling's experiences in the First Bishop's War and that the palatine uprising in the script represents the Scottish insurrection.³⁷

Brennoralt presents neither the "frail waif" nor the embarrassed desiring female subject, but indicates another form of textual anxiety surrounding female homoerotic desire—the displacement of male sexual prerogative. The tragedy concerns Iphigene, a young palatine, who, like Iphis in Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, has been disguised as male from birth.³⁸ Iphigene loves Almerin, a childhood friend, unfortunately Almerin loves Francelia and has sided with her father's rebel forces in a conflict with the king of Poland. In order to save Almerin, newly the king's captive, Iphigene allows the rebels to take her prisoner, thinking to exchange her life for his. However, Almerin escapes, and the two find themselves together in the rebel camp where Francelia falls in love with the disguised Iphigene.

Suckling's play is distinct in that the cross-dressed Iphigene plays the aggressor rather than the diffident object of another's misguided affection.³⁹ Like Middleton's Kate in the city comedy *No Wit, No Help Like a Woman's*, Iphigene takes advantage of male disguise to seduce a woman for her own purposes.⁴⁰ Kate does so for economic gain, but Iphigene does so to keep Almerin from marrying Francelia, although Francelia seems to have little interest in the play's male characters. In her boldness, Iphigene resembles the cross-dressed heroines of romantic comedy, yet her fate is very different. Iphigene's unusual behavior eventually leads to her destruction. While homoerotic intrigue has humorous appeal in comedy, in tragedy the same activity ends in dire consequences.

At the beginning of act 3, when Iphigene realizes that Francelia is attracted to her, she quickly seizes the "unexpected" opportunity to keep Almerin and Francelia apart by seducing Francelia herself. Iphigene asks the "God of desires" to instill in her the kind of "language" that brings lovers "easie victories" (3.1.73–75).⁴¹ Iphigene proves an ardent companion, and Francelia laments that Iphigene will forget her when the factions reach a peace and they part. However,

Iphigene reassures her:

By this—the readiest and the sweetest oath, I swear [Kisses]
 I cannot so secure my selfe of you,
 But in my absence I shall be in paine. (4.4.7–9)

Like Shirley's *The Doubtful Heir*, the physical action of Iphigene's kiss resounds in the theatrical space, even more so here because both parties welcome the contact. Iphigene is no reluctant, resisting quarry awkwardly evading pursuit, but the eager lover of a willing, impassioned partner. Many cross-dressed heroines in both comedy and tragicomedy, even those who, like Shakespeare's Rosalind or Middleton's Kate, relish the transvestite disguise, shun or disdain physical contact with other women. However, Iphigene exploits her male disguise and enthusiastically performs the male subject role in a sexual relationship with another woman. Since tragedy did not require Suckling to resolve his action happily, but allowed him to condemn his disguised heroine, it provides the perfect form for his drama. Suckling could openly explore female homoerotics because he could fulfill society's requisite condemnation of the desire. Like the real-life cross-dressers known to Montaigne and Estienne, Iphigene is ultimately executed for transgressing acceptable forms of sexual and gendered behavior.

The play's concluding scene begins with Iphigene and Francelia alone in Francelia's bed, apparently having spent the night together.⁴² No other play in this study, except *The Spanish Bawd*,⁴³ situates female characters in such physical intimacy, and if the earlier kiss between Iphigene and Francelia elevated the significance of their erotic relationship, the circumstances of 5.3 suggest that erotic desire has been fulfilled with sexual union. The scene's romantic and sexual context as well as its rhetoric bear faint echoes of Romeo and Juliet debating the dawn and lamenting their forced separation. If Iphigene has stayed all night with Francelia, what expectations should the audience have of their actions? How far did Iphigene take her disguise? Is the audience to assume her comfort with kissing Francelia indicates a disposition to engage in other sexual actions? The scene seems constructed specifically to pique the audience's prurient sexual imagination, but also romanticizes the couple.

Suckling may be reticent about what has occurred between the women, but he is clear about the erotic context of the situation when Almerin finds them together and stabs both in a jealous rage. As she is dying, Iphigene manages to tell him that she is a woman, and Almerin

runs off in search of aid, leaving the two women in a dying embrace. Despite Iphigene's deceit, it is clear Francelia still loves her, for she envies a world allowed to enjoy Iphigene "though I possesse you not" (5.3.122). Iphigene's response suggests she has developed an enduring affection for Francelia rivaling her love for Almerin:

Iphigene: have you
 So perfectly forgiv'n already, as to
 Consider me a losse? I doubt which Sexe
 I shall be happier in. Climates of Friendship
 Are not lesse pleasant, 'cause they are lesse scortching,
 Then those of Love; and under them wee'l live:
 Such pretious links of that wee'l tye our souls
 Together with, that the chaines of the other
 Shall be grosse fetters to it. (5.3.123–31)

Iphigene tells the audience that female friendships are more emotionally sustaining than the confining passions of heterosexual love and that women's relationships have an affinity that surpasses heterosexual unions. And yet, this rhetoric of friendship seems a pale exemplar for the erotic exchanges between these two women. Is "pleasant" friendship possible after the physical intimacies they have shared and that must have been "scortching" at least for Francelia? What kind of relationship is available to them once they have behaved so "grossly," as Phillis would describe it? No wonder Suckling has them die, for what other narrative option is available?

Rather than attempt a conventional conclusion for this play, in which the cross-dressed heroine invariably marries her male love interest, Suckling applied the motif in a purely tragic form.⁴⁴ Tragedy proves an apt structure to explore the dangerous ramifications for a cross-dressed woman caught in a homoerotic encounter. Francelia dies with a consoling Iphigene at her side, and Iphigene, already badly wounded, dies shortly after. The romantic context of their relationship, originating from a desperate necessity and redirected emotion, is pitiable rather than comic or satiric and their tragic end is more grievous than justified. In a sympathetic tribute, Suckling orchestrates the deaths of his two heroines to exclude male characters from the final moments of their lives. Having resolutely rejected male suitors earlier in the play, Francelia is the only character to die with the person she loved—Iphigene. *Brennoralt* is a rare tragedy containing female homoeroticism, and the dramatic form requires a shift in presentational expectations. Liberated from romantic comedy, female homoerotic

desire, treated with an emotional sensitivity, moderates from the humorous to the affecting.

A summary of the construction in comic form will help illustrate the thematic shift between its appearance in comedy and Suckling's use of it in tragedy. Comedies depicting female homoerotics that employ a cross-dressed heroine tend to follow a standard plot construct in which that heroine becomes the object of another woman's affection. The convention of playfully emergent homoerotic desires between women is replicated in plays like *James IV*, *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night*, *No Wit, No Help Like a Woman's*, *The Widdow*, *Anything for a Quiet Life*, *A Madd Couple Well Matchd*, *The Sisters*, and *Love's Riddle*. Cross-dressing is the narrative strategy employed by playwrights who construct homoerotic representations between female characters by contradicting the disguise when they foreground feminine characteristics in the cross-dressed heroine. Surprisingly, despite proscriptions against female transvestism, the comedies present a humorous image of female homoerotic desire, using the social taboo as titillation but never creating more than a comic tension within the erotic structures. Comic scenarios may go so far as to assume that homosocially viable relationships will coexist with heterosexual ones. And, while the cross-dressed figure may not return the affection directed toward her, this character type demonstrates various degrees of willingness to participate in amorous flirtation with other women, including brief physical manifestations of desire that are neither condemned or punished. Primarily, these are assertive, mischievous heroines, who take charge of the action around them.

In contrast to her depiction in comic scenarios, the cross-dressed character appearing in tragedy and tragicomedy becomes the site of an anxiously emergent homoerotic passion. Not only do the cross-dressed heroines in these plays more vigorously reject the sexual attention directed toward them than their counterparts in comedy, but the desiring subjects also evince some discomfort with their homoerotic attractions. Eroclea, Rosania, and Daniel's Silvia demonstrate their anxiety by trying to deflect the sexual advances of Thamasta, Olivia, and Phillis. In turn, these desiring subjects voice their own apprehension and shame at having directed their desire toward other women. Suckling's *Brennoralt* registers a marked disparity in that Iphigene embraces her role as seductress with impenitent pleasure, and Francelia displays little remorse for her attraction. However, since the man who loves them murders both women for their indiscretion, Suckling also seems to comment on the impropriety of their behavior. The dead might be pitied who when alive would only cause distress.

Iphigene's death delegates her to the status of sympathetic tragic heroine—a woman whose life circumstances oblige compassionate consideration of her actions.

However, although sympathetic, tragedy seems incapable of recuperating homoerotic desires and the female characters subordinate to such attractions. A comparison between *Brennoralt*, *The Lover's Melancholy*, and *The Doubtful Heir* will illustrate this point. Iphigene has lived all her life as a man, and Suckling does not expose her sexual identity until the play's final scene although he indicates Iphigene's transvestism to his audience early in the play. In contrast, Ford's spectators discover that Eroclea is a woman early in act 2, and Shirley openly presents Rosania as a woman in disguise upon her first stage appearance. These levels of representation in the tragicomedies seem to highlight the femininity of the characters. Iphigene, however unintentionally, usurps the male license of her ancestral line and compounds that transgression by consciously usurping Almerin's male sexual prerogative with Francelia. Iphigene threatens male authority and the text ultimately punishes her for it. Conversely, Eroclea and Rosania support male sexual privilege. In her scene with Thamasta in 3.2, Eroclea promotes Menaphon's virtues as a lover. Similarly, a self-sacrificing Rosania declares that Ferdinand should consummate his marriage contract with Olivia. Both are rewarded in the patriarchal structure with royal marriages, Eroclea to Palador, and Rosania to Ferdinand, while their erstwhile female lovers—arguably more aberrant characters who desire, albeit unconsciously, other women—are bestowed on men of slightly lower station. Although all three plays present fictive representations of female homoerotic desire since all three cross-dressed heroines love male characters, only Ford and Shirley's women are recuperated into a heterosexual paradigm, never really having left it. Eroclea and Rosania do not welcome homoerotic advances, while Thamasta and Olivia are unknowing subjects in same-sex relationships they assume are heterosexual. The irredeemable characters are Suckling's Iphigene and Francelia—Iphigene for transgressing her female role and sexually pursuing another woman, and Francelia for rejecting her male suitors while enjoying Iphigene's advances. The social structure condemns both women for their homoerotic desires and expels both, although Suckling represents that action as more pitiable than damning.

Homoerotic desire in tragedy, unlike the homoeroticism represented in comedy, is presented as aberrant behavior and punished for its aberrance. Comedies and tragicomedies ultimately excuse homoerotic desires—cross-dressed women are clearly heterosexual and generally

reject female advances, and desiring subjects are merely mistaken. Middleton's Kate, who negotiates a marriage with Lady Goldenfleece, refuses to consummate their union. In *A Madd Couple Well Matcht*, Brome only places Amie in sexual encounters with women rhetorically. Even Cowley's Callidora, who enjoys the attentions of other women and engages in playful physical flirtation, retreats from serious affection and attachment. Both Ford's Eroclea and Shirley's Rosania do what they can to avoid intimate contact with their desiring subjects. However, in a tragedy like *Brennoral*, Iphigene assumes a more sexually aggressive male subject position than other disguised heroines in comedies or tragicomedies and the play disposes of her because it cannot reconcile her back into a heterosexual paradigm.

III A CHRISTIAN TURN'D TURKE AND ORGULA

Two other tragedies deserve discussion because they demonstrate tragedy's inability to reconcile female homoerotic desires. In both texts, female characters who find their attractions directed toward cross-dressed women react violently. Robert Daborne's adventure saga *A Christian Turn'd Turke* (1609–12) is one, and the other is Leonard Willan's late tragedy *Orgula* (1658). The King's Men or the Queen's Revels performed Daborne's play, while Willan's piece is a closet drama from the Interregnum. In both tragedies, unlike the other plays discussed in this chapter, the desiring subject is also one of the story's villains and her restive lust for the disguised heroine is a further indication of the infamy of each character. These two women differ from most female characters involved in cross-dressed homoerotic situations, who are usually presented either with comic indulgence or with erotic eccentricity and accepted into the social order, because they are expelled from society—an innovation of the standard disguised heroine convention. By the end of most plays, female characters involved in homoerotic scenarios—except for Iphigene and Francelia, whose deaths are tragically regrettable—become reconciled with those around them. However, Voada and Orgula, the desiring subjects in Daborne and Willan's plays, present a seamier look at female homoeroticism, and signal the potential of even more sordid and chastened representations.

Daborne's *A Christian Turn'd Turke* functions as a corrective to Christian apostasy and deromanticizes the heroic nature of English privateering by emphasizing the moral depravity of its practitioners.⁴⁵ The story fancifully depicts the historical pirates Ward and Dansiker,

focusing on Ward's eventual ruin after his conversion to Islam. Closely bound with Ward's story is that of Alizia, a young Christian woman about to be married. When the two pirates attack her ship, Alizia disguises herself as a boy named Fidelio, and Ward takes her as his servant. A Turkish woman, Voada, eventually falls in love with Alizia, while Ward himself becomes infatuated with Voada. As the embodiment of an early modern cultural stereotype of the foreign "other," Voada is the evil temptress—economically and sexually rapacious—and her desire for Alizia is only one aspect of a larger degenerate character.⁴⁶ When she first sees Alizia, Voada wishes the "lovely," "rare featur'd" boy were hers and declares that she "must enjoy his love," even if that passion "did burn the world besides" (sig. D1v).⁴⁷ Voada, like many other women enamored of disguised heroines, remarks on Alizia's beauty. However, the violence of Voada's imaginative lust shifts the mistaken attraction from the conventionally comic to the deviant. Hedonistic pleasure and a brutal disregard for humanity characterize her speech. In the exotic reaches where Turks, Jews, and foreign pirates intermingle and marry, one woman's desire for another becomes part of the seemingly perverted sexual landscape.

Ward eventually marries Voada, which brings her into close contact with his young page, and the mistress is observed taking great liberties with her husband's servant. Voada "makes him sing bawdy songs to her, lookes fortunes in his fist, & babies in his eyes, makes dialogues betwixt him, her little dogge, & her selfe: lies upon her backe, puts his hand in her hand, & wrings it till the teares come againe" (sig. G3). Although the physical aspect of the relationship between Voada and Alizia is kept offstage, the descriptive image is vivid and depicts obsessive, infantile erotic behavior. Alizia eventually agrees to sleep with Voada but plots to escape with her fiancé before the night arrives. Unfortunately, her planned evasion goes horribly awry, and both she and her lover are murdered. Shortly after their deaths, Voada and Ward succeed in killing each other out of spite and revenge. By the end of the play, only the Turkish characters survive—an admonition against religious, cultural, economic, and sexual transgression.

Leonard Willan wrote *Orgula; or the Fatall Error* during the last years of the Interregnum and it is doubtful that the play was publicly acted.⁴⁸ Grouped by Dale B. J. Randall as one of several plays concerning tyrannical rulers from the mid-seventeenth century, the work offers a thinly veiled attack on the Cromwellian protectorate.⁴⁹ In the script, the play's title character, Orgula, attempts to seduce Fidelia, a cross-dressed heroine similar to Euphrasia in *Philaster*. Fidelia has assumed her dead brother Fidelius's identity in order to be close to

Ludaster, the play's hero, whom she idolizes. At the moment Orgula decides she must couple her beauty with the power and wealth of the usurping Sinevero, she also becomes enamored of the recently arrived page, Fidelius. When contrasting Sinevero's age with Fidelius's youthful beauty, she asserts that: "It must distaste / A Virgin to yeeld up the passion / Of her first Embraces, from him she loves / Deservedly, to Age and Impotence" (sig. H1).⁵⁰ When Fidelia evades Orgula's advances, it is easy to see the conventional cross-dressing scenario at work. However, Orgula is not typical of homoerotically desiring subjects. She is vain, condescending, and adulterous—exhibiting the pride suggested by her name.⁵¹ While other female characters attracted to cross-dressed women, such as Ford's Thamasta and Shakespeare's Phebe, display similar arrogance, Orgula's immorality is comparable only with Voada's iniquity. In order to help his mistress acquire both passion and power, Orgula's servant Mundolo, the play's main villain, offers to drug Sinevero with laudanum after he marries Orgula so that she can spend her wedding night making love to Fidelia instead.

On the night of Orgula's wedding, with Sinevero out of the way in a drug-induced stupor, Orgula prepares to seduce the young page. However, Mundolo is unable to convince Fidelia to sleep with Orgula, and while Fidelia contemplates the "labyrinth" (sig. K3) into which she has fallen, Mundolo quickly beds a satisfied Orgula and slinks away. Orgula then enters in a night robe "amorously accosting Fid[elia]" (sig. K3v) to continue their supposed lovemaking: "Let our souls / Meet in their faculties, as our Organs have / In theirs" (sig. K3v). The illicit sensuality of the scene, heightened not merely by the adultery and the homoerotic scenario but also by Mundolo's transgression of class boundaries, is intensified by the carnality of Orgula's lines. She offers herself, her breast to be exact, to Fidelia, saying, "Hang not thy head down like a flower / Drooping for a timely show'r. I'll transplant / Thee to my Brest from whence thou shalt assume / Fresh vigour: where thus my soule I'll effuse / To multiply thy spirit [She offers to him, he falls on his knee]" (sig. K3v).⁵² This action is comparable with the visual shock of onstage kisses in *The Doubtful Heir* and *Brennoralt*, or to the latter play's bedroom scene between Iphigene and Francelia. A few lines later, Fidelia exposes her disguise by taking Orgula's hand and placing it inside her jerkin on her own breast. The two women part immediately, Orgula destined for insanity after murdering Sinevero whom she mistakes for the disingenuous Mundolo, and Fidelia to her death at Mundolo's hands.

Both Voada and Orgula represent a departure from other female characters desiring cross-dressed heroines. Women such as Shirley's

and Shakespeare's Olivias, Lady Anderson in Robert Greene's *James IV*, and Bellula in Abraham Cowley's *Love's Riddle* are sympathetically presented. They possess traditional feminine characteristics and are usually rewarded with an appropriate, if not always sought after, marriageable mate for the assumed inconvenience of loving another woman. Sometimes, as with Middleton's Lady Goldenfleece, Shakespeare's Phebe, and Ford's Thamasta, the desiring subject is arrogant and superior, a woman for whom the mistaken desire works as a social corrective to the unattractive characteristics in her temperament or as punishment for class transgressions. Nevertheless, even they end their plays by getting married to worthy husbands. Only Voada and Orgula have truly villainous tendencies as they lust after wealth and/or power, as well as an innocent cross-dressed heroine. They plot their adulteries with cold calculation and end up spiraling into madness and murder.

These two plays also question the attraction of the cross-dressed character. Voada's sister Agar is incredulous that her sibling could "lose" herself by falling for someone neither manly nor attractive (sig. D1v). Orgula calls Mundolo "stupid" when he comments on Fidelius's androgyny and fails to see the youth's perfection (sig. G2). Both comments suggest that these women exhibit abnormal attractions because they desire a figure others find unremarkable or unappealing. These two tragedies seem to imply that the androgynous figure is only attractive to a woman with aberrant sexual tastes, to a woman with homosexual inclinations, otherwise the desiring subject would find nothing desirable in the disguised heroine. An unnatural or inappropriate sexual attraction, even a mistaken one, becomes another aspect of the already corrupt identities of both Voada and Orgula. Although the cross-dressed scenarios in both plays follow conventional forms, when the disguised heroine is placed in relation with one of these women, the erotic potential takes on a threatening rather than comic tenor.

These two desiring subjects are also responsible for the destruction of the disguised heroines. Both Alizia and Fidelia are murdered, the former by a jealous Ward owing to her perceived relationship with Voada, and the latter by an incensed Mundolo for her rejection of Orgula. Rather than retribution for their assumption of male disguise, Alizia and Fidelia's deaths become attendant crimes of unnatural lust. The slaughter of these two innocents, who in both plays are minor characters attempting to maintain their virtue and purity in worlds of arrant corruption, adds to the tragic milieu. These tragedies emphasize the depravity of the desiring subject while they reduce the culpability

of the disguised heroine. Alizia assumes male attire to protect her virginity against marauding pirates and works desperately to reunite with her fiancé. Fidelia is motivated to dress in male clothes by an altruistic desire to serve the noble Ludaster. In contrast, lechery and greed animate Voadia and Orgula, who Daborne and Willan construct as nearly predatory villains—a character type examined more aptly in chapter 4.

The seven plays discussed in this chapter evince an anxiety associated with female homoerotic attractions, an anxiety that plays out in the world of the text and encouraged an attendant discomfort in the audience. The timid cross-dressed heroines of these tragedies and tragicomedies, the “frail waif,” display discomfort and embarrassment at other women’s sexual interest. They are far removed from the cross-dressed heroines of seventeenth-century comedies like *Love’s Riddle*, in which Callidora kisses various shepherdesses with easy promiscuity and regrets her inability to satisfy Bellula and Hylace. Iphigene is the one exception to this classification. She instigates the erotic seduction of Francelia with supple poise. However, all the other disguised heroines in the tragedies and tragicomedies discussed here attempt to deflect the sexual advances of female characters. Some of the desiring subjects themselves, especially those in tragicomedies, such as Phillis, Thamasta, and Olivia are profoundly distressed by their attraction to other women, and their discomfort is the characteristic that reconciles them with the social order. These anxieties signal a conceptual shift in attitudes toward female homoeroticism from the tolerance of romantic comedies to the serious impropriety of tragicomedy and the more explicit condemnation of tragedy. In the last three plays studied here, all tragedies, death is the inevitable result of homoerotic attraction—death is also the conventional conclusion of twentieth-century cinematic representations of homoerotic desire—and suggests that these dramatic texts exact a heavy moral judgement.⁵³

Each of the authors discussed here, using the convention of cross-dressing in tragedy and tragicomedy, constructed emotionally complex scenes of female homoerotic desire within otherwise heterosexually structured narratives. Ford, Shirley, and Suckling were the most adept at managing the convention within a serious dramatic context, without humor or satire. Ford, who reveals his disguised heroine to her lover in an intimate rather than a group scene, provided space for a psychologically motivated reaction from the desiring subject that acknowledges the ambiguity of gender-based attraction. Shirley manipulates language to present an overt dialogue of homoerotic seduction undiluted by male pronouns necessitated by the cross-dressed

persona. Suckling subverts narrative conventions by having his cross-dressed character play the seducer and then heightens the sentimentality of the joint death of his heroines by having them admit a mutual affection. None of these situations could have been sustained in comedy, but the stylistic shift to tragicomedy and tragedy supports variations of the conventional model. These playwrights found novel and complex approaches to the representation of female homoeroticism.

CHAPTER 4



PREDATORY LESBIAN EROTICS

In “Female–female Eroticism and the Early Modern Stage,” Douglas Bruster cautioned against the tendency of scholars to focus on “affirmative aspects” of female homoeroticism.¹ Arguing that power and the interrelation between dominance and submission excite desire as much as mutuality, Bruster focuses on aggressive episodes of female homoerotic subversion. That is, he examines instances of “triangulated eroticism” in which a female character, often older and worldly, gains erotic pleasure by seducing or forcing a younger, innocent woman into a sexual relationship with a man.² Bruster offers his discussion of erotically manipulative female characters in early modern drama as a contrast to the trend in contemporary criticism to focus solely on utopian pairings—relationships characterized by mutual affection between women and the idealization of female–female attachment. Bruster cites Rosalind and Celia from *As You Like It*, Helena and Hermia from *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Emilia and Flavina in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, and Gallathea and Phyllida from John Lyly’s *Gallathea* as examples of utopian relationships. Bruster further argues that a number of these scenes were meant to arouse the audience but were not illustrative of a homoerotic subject—the actions of the scene might be homoerotically coded, but the characters are not.

As evidence that dark passions and violent tendencies also stimulate homoerotic interests, Bruster considers the pleasure Tamora takes in her sons’ rape of Lavinia in *Titus Andronicus* (1594), especially her figurative inclusion in the sexual act when she encourages Demetrius and Chiron to take from Lavinia “the honey *we* desire” (2.3.131).³ That Tamora includes herself in wanting the product of Lavinia’s sexual assault, her “honey,” emphasizes the homoerotic connotations

in the scene, according to Bruster.⁴ He also focuses on several plays of Thomas Middleton, a playwright equally drawn, according to the evidence in chapter 2, to playful constructions of female homoerotic desire. Bruster reads aggressive homoerotic seduction and female manipulation in the relationships between Gratiana and Castiza in *The Revenger's Tragedy* (1606–07), Livia, Bianca, and Isabella in *Women Beware Women* (1620–27), the White Queen's Pawn and the Black Queen's Pawn in *A Game at Chess* (1624), and Beatrice-Joanna with Diaphanta in *The Changeling* (1622).⁵ According to Bruster, bawds, both commercial ones and dilettantes, are central to these triangulated seductions, and he analyzes Marina's encounter with the Bawd in *Pericles* (1606–08) as indicative of these relationships.

This chapter looks at a number of plays that present constructions of female homoerotic manipulation or sexual aggression and violence. Bruster was correct to caution that not all relationships between women in early modern drama are utopian; however, the construct is not isolated to the triangulated relationships he identifies. Section I examines encounters in which women use coercive forms of affection and sexual attraction to manipulate the behavior of other women. Section II, as does Bruster's article, investigates prostitution and the relationship between bawds and their apparent whores coerced into the trade. Section III looks at instances of sexual violence between women, specifically the construction of rape scenarios. Section IV looks at two plays from the Interregnum that juxtapose aggression between women with female amity. In each section, the suggestion of a homoerotic gloss compounds criminality with sexual deviance. Female characters in these plays are presented as predators; not specifically as pillagers of female virtue, although that is one construction, but as corrupt individuals for whom homosexuality or the use of homoerotic desire is a manifestation of their immorality. They prey on other women primarily out of jealousy and revenge, although the construct of female sexual aggression appears in various scenarios.

I CONSTRUCTIONS OF COERCION AND MANIPULATION

Female characters that use affection or sexual interest to control the actions of other women comprise the most prevalent construct of predatory scenarios of homoerotic desire. An early representation of female manipulation that relies on the affection of one woman for another—or the assumption of gender affinity—is John Dymock's translation of Gaurini's *Il Pastor Fido* (1601). In the play, familial

constraints, social regulations, and intrigue complicate affectional relationships. Both the beautiful Amarillis and the treacherous Corsica love Mirtillo, and while he longs for the former, she is contracted to another suitor. Corsica also works to keep Amarillis and Mirtillo apart by feigning a loving allegiance to Amarillis. In reality, Corsica plans to get her rival condemned to death, which will leave the field clear for her to seduce Mirtillo. What distinguishes Corsica's intrigue is her use of the erotic to gain Amarillis's confidence. Corsica claims Amarillis is "dearer then / Mine eies, my life" (sig. F2v) and offers her selfless assistance to help Amarillis gain Mirtillo.⁶ However, Corsica's altruism is a calculated ploy for she "know[s] too well / How hartie praier of a gracious Love / Can tempt a tender wenches hart," and while Amarillis "made defence to [her] assault" Corsica knows she can "batter downe this rocke" (sig. F4). Amarillis does not immediately trust Corsica, but eventually succumbs to the "assault" on her affections because of an assumption of female alliance—she cannot believe that Corsica means her any harm. The play conjoins this predatory female eroticism with malfeasance—Corsica uses the erotic to gain Amarillis's trust and affect her death—equating a willingness to engage in female homoeroticism with criminality. Of course, in the pleasant world of pastoral delight, Amarillis and Mirtillo finally unite in marriage and forgive Corsica for her intrigue.

Margaret Cavendish constructs a similar scenario in her tragedy, *The Matrimonial Trouble* (1662), but with different consequences. Cavendish's Mistress Forsaken is the only truly predatory cross-dressed heroine in early modern drama—a calculating creature that uses her disguise to exact a vicious revenge.⁷ The text appears in Cavendish's first volume of drama, *Playes Written by the Thrice Noble, Illustrious and Excellent Princess, The Lady Marchioness of New Castle*.⁸ Written in two parts, the narrative traces a number of heterosexual relationships, but focuses on the tragedy that results when Sir Francis Inconstant rejects Mistress Forsaken.⁹ Cavendish depicts a jealous woman, like Corsica in *Il Pastor Fido*, who erotically manipulates her rival, here using disguise and sexual attraction as a coercive tool. In part 1 of the play, Sir Francis deserts his lover, Forsaken, to marry another woman. Not trusting the news of the wedding nor Sir Francis, Forsaken appears at the marriage banquet as Monsieur Disguise and reports her own death to the surprised groom. Affected by the news, Sir Francis retires, but Forsaken takes his place, literally, at the feast. The plot then follows conventions of female cross-dressing, for the guests perceive that the bride is attracted to Forsaken, even though they think Monsieur Disguise looks "more like a woman than a man" (sig. Rrrrr2).¹⁰ As with previous manifestations

of female cross-gendering, the feminine characteristics that Forsaken displays, qualities easily discernible to other characters in the play, attract the bride. Forsaken encourages the attraction, dancing with the new Lady Inconstant and telling her "Madam, you are the Treasure of Pleasure and Delight" (sig. Rrrrr2); however, Forsaken's motives in seducing the woman are not clear until midway through part 2. In this respect, the text is unusual. Disguised female characters, like Kate Low-water, clearly explain their rationale for seducing other women; or, like Amie, their disguise is kept secret through most of the play. The motives and sexual interests of characters like Forsaken, or the amiable Callidora, are less clear.

What started, rather traditionally, as a disguise plot turns sinister in act 3 of part 2 when Lady Inconstant promises to kill her husband, who becomes an obstacle between herself and her new lover. Forsaken obviously maneuvered events to this end and means to avenge the rejection she suffered or die trying: "My revenge is too big for words, all actions too little for his punishment; wherefore you furies, I invoke you to assist me, and if Hell gives me not help, Heaven or Death give me ease" (sig. Cccccc1v). Forsaken exploits her homoerotic attractiveness with murderous intent. No other cross-dressed heroine has used her disguise for so vindictive or malicious a purpose. Forsaken then provokes the husband and tells him of his wife's design. Not satisfied with murdering the man she loves, Forsaken plans to kill them both. Her depravity leads her to seek "triumph" in a double homicide (sig. Eeeee2). Informed of the plot, Sir Francis kills Lady Inconstant as she attempts to poison him; and, in the play's final scene, Forsaken goads Sir Francis into a duel in which both suffer mortal wounds. Having achieved her revenge, she reveals her identity, and the play ends amidst their dying absolution of each others' treachery. The text equates gender transgression and homoerotic attraction with deceit, villainy, and murder. Once Forsaken cross-dresses, she becomes a sinister figure, although in female attire she appeared a sympathetic character. In the early narrative, Cavendish constructs her as the forlorn heroine jilted by the capricious Sir Francis, but she stalks the middle of the story as a murderous, cross-dressed seductress who lures a woman to her death. The final image of the play, however, recuperates Forsaken into a heterosexual construct where she regains a modicum of pity and dies a pathetic, but not tragic, death.

Cavendish constructed the disguised heroine sought after by a married woman in dark contrast with most other versions of the scenario like those that figure in Shirley's *The Doubtful Heir*, Marmion's *The Antiquary*, Greene's *James IV*, Brome's *A Madd Couple Well*

Matcht, and Middleton's *Anything for a Quiet Life* and *The Widdow*. These plays use a variety of rationales to construct the homoerotic inconstancy of wives. For Middleton's Phillipa, Marmion's Aemilia, and Brome's Alicia an extramarital relationship is a natural part of marriage, especially for a wife with a foolish old husband who is sexually inadequate. In these comedies, the homoerotic nature of the attraction excuses its infidelity, for the wife commits adultery in thought but not in action and never really jeopardizes honor or inheritance. She could not cuckold her husband with another woman, especially not one resistant to the affair in the first place, or at least would not risk producing an heir through the union, even if the disguised heroine were sexually willing. Furthermore, the comic nature of the scenario alleviates any impropriety that might adhere to the homoerotic construct, again primarily owing to the disguised heroine's sexual reluctance. In contrast, Shirley's Olivia attempts to make her husband jealous with an extramarital seduction and her misguided attraction to another woman becomes a sign of her sexual frustration. Middleton's Sib uses a same-sex relationship to protect her honor. While Greene's Lady Anderson presents the pathetically naive although ultimately sympathetic wife of a noble Scot whose homoerotic attraction signifies the immaturity of the Scottish people. Although several of these characters may search for ways to enjoy an adulterous tryst, the narratives in which they appear ultimately excuse their wayward longings and reconcile them with their husbands.

Instead, Cavendish echoes the construct that Willan and Daborne created in *Orgula* and *A Christian Turn'd Turke* where homoerotic attraction indicates an immoral character. Both *Orgula* and *Voada* desire disguised heroines whose undistinguished and effeminate appearance cause the surrounding society to dismiss them as objects of sexual interest. Desire for the cross-dressed woman then identifies an unnatural lust—an extension of other unsociable behaviors. In the same way, Lady Inconstant develops a strong attraction to Forsaken despite her obvious effeminacy, but the homoerotic desire she feels only suggests other more dangerous impulses as she quickly turns adulteress and murderer. Like *Orgula* and *Voada*, her desire leads Lady Inconstant in her own death and she barely understands the full circumstances in which she dies. Scheming and impenitent, her rejection of social norms leads to her own destruction.

Even more remarkable than the brutality of her desiring subject is the nature of the disguised heroine Cavendish created. Mistress Forsaken represents the only construction of a female cross-dressed villain. Generally, cross-dressed heroines are unmarried women erotically

positioned with other unmarried women, their status outside matrimony providing a certain amount of erotic freedom in the conjugal economy. Cross-dressed characters involved with women generally do not encourage the attraction, or like Callidora and Dorothea, do so out of compassion for the desiring subject. Middleton's Kate Low-water does seduce Lady Goldenfleece, but the text justifies that action as an appropriate and clever corrective to an economic injustice. The romantic comedy in which Middleton constructs his scenario also ensures that his disguised heroine remains innocent of any sexual or moral depravity. Certainly Suckling's Iphigene is far more compassionate than Forsaken and while she schemes to keep Francelia from Almerin she never stoops to homicide and genuinely loves them both. Only Forsaken becomes an unsympathetic cross-dresser. She is the only female character that uses her disguise to seduce another woman with malicious intent. Forsaken exploits the homoerotic attraction occasioned by her disguise and preys upon the sexual interest of another woman to affect the murder of her former lover. Forsaken's manipulation of Lady Inconstant and Lady Inconstant's eagerness to kill her new husband signify the predatory nature of the characters in Cavendish's play *The Matrimonial Trouble*.

II PROSTITUTION AND SAME-SEX EROTICISM

Female-female sexual manipulation and erotic control in early modern drama is perhaps nowhere more apparent than in situations of prostitution. As an icon of illicit and excessive sexuality, the bawd obviously represents a pejorative image of homoerotic desire. The animus directed at commercial sex and its transgressions incorporates same-sex eroticism within the brothel as one variant in an organization of presumably despised aberrant behaviors. Thus, in Percy's *The Cuck-Queanes and Cuckolds Errants*, Pearle describes his wife's iniquity by stringing together numerous derogatory epithets of sexual subversiveness that function as interchangeable identifiers—"Hore, Hare, Harlot, Bitch, Fellatrice, Witch, Bawde, Ribaud, Tribade." And Lady Politic Would-be connects gender subversions, sexuality, and prostitution when she accuses Peregrine of being a "fricatrice" an "harlot" a eunuch and a hermaphrodite in Jonson's *Volpone*. These two examples suggest that any kind of gender and sexual transgressions were equated with an entire spectrum of subversive practices, and that any person perceived to exhibit one behavior was assumed to be prone to all the others. Therefore, a woman capable of prostitution is as likely to engage in homosexual activities.

The figure of the bawd, as the procurer of women in a sexual exchange with men, is responsible for other women's sexual enlightenment, availability, and expertise. According to Bruster, as the mediator in the sexual commodification of women, the bawd must see and relate to prostitutes as men would, which involves her in highly sexualized interactions with the various women in her charge.¹¹ The bawd becomes a surrogate man. When Lucar seduces Conscience in Wilson's *The Three Ladies of London*, she does so to establish a new brothel beyond the prying eyes of city officials where she can resort with her friends in sexual abandon. The house that Conscience rents becomes the location of "sportes and sweete delight" where the women's "pleasures shall excell" (sig. E1–E1v). Lucar suggests that the retreat will harbor a variety of sexually wanton behaviors, including, one may assume, carnal activity between the two. While the bawd fashions her women into desirable objects for a paying clientele, she also becomes the catalyst for their sensual liberality. The bawd herself first arouses women like Conscience before she directs their sexual excitement toward the men they will service.

A sixteenth-century Flemish painting by an unknown artist illustrates this aspect of the bawd's role. In the work, one man sits at a table with four women, all of whom wear similar headdresses. While three of the women also wear identical clothing, with their breasts exposed, the dress of the fourth woman covers her chest and neck. She has her arms around the waist of one of the other women and looks at her lustfully. In the iconography of brothel paintings, this fourth woman probably represents the bawd displaying her women for the male customer. The image graphically depicts the eroticized relationship between bawds and prostitutes, one that includes voyeurism, physical intimacies, and erotic stimulation to advertise the sexually commodified body to its best advantage. However, in *Bawds and Lodgings: A History of the London Bankside Brothels c. 100–1675*, E. J. Burford captions the painting "Prostitutes and clients round a table," which implies an alternate possibility.¹² The fourth woman, like her male counterpart, may be purchasing a sexual encounter with one of the prostitutes.¹³ Whether as bawd or customer, the woman enjoys a position of sexual dominance over the prostitute in her grasp (see figure 4.1).

The Spanish Bawd explicitly represents the homoerotic potential in the commercial relationships between bawds and prostitutes. Like *The Three Ladies of London*, *The Spanish Bawd* (1631) locates predatory female homoeroticism in the already illicit and immorally coded world of prostitution. Translated by James Mabbe from Fernando de Rojas's play *Celestina: or, The Tragicomedy of Calisto and Melibea*,



Figure 4.1 Prostitutes and clients around a table.

The Spanish Bawd is a tediously long drama that includes one of the most overt depictions of female homosexual activity in early modern drama.¹⁴ Celestina is the bawd who unites the lovers Calisto and Melibea. Early in the play, she is also instrumental in arranging a liaison for Parmeno, Calisto's servant, during which she engages in sexual contact with the reluctant woman chosen to be his whore. The action begins late at night when Celestina goes up to Areusa's room while Parmeno waits below. After encouraging Areusa to get in bed,

Celestina's own sexual agitation becomes apparent: "O! how like a Syren doest thou looke? How faire, how beautifull? O! how sweetely every thing smells about you . . . My Pearle, my Jewell of gold, see whether I love you or no, that I come to visit you at this time of night? Let my eye take its fill in beholding of thee; it does me much good to touch thee, and to looke upon thee" (sig. M4v).¹⁵ Celestina, in fact, does begin to touch Areusa, who confesses to being troubled all day with "the Mother" (sig. M4v).

The "mother" was both a physical and emotional "disease" connected to the uterus. In an essay about the ailment, titled *A Briefe Discourse of a Disease Called The Suffocation of the Mother*, Edward Jorden defined both internal and external causes for the affliction and described a wide variety of symptoms associated with what some people suspected was possession by the devil. In *The Spanish Bawd*, Areusa refers to a "paine" in her "brest" and to choking, both of which were specific manifestations of "the Mother" (sig. M4v). Jorden explains that movement of the womb causes "choaking in the throat" when physical forces draw the womb "upwards or sideways above his natural seate, compressing the neighbour parts" (sig. C1-C1v).¹⁶ By touching Areusa, Celestina means to draw the womb back down and alleviate the "paine" the young woman feels through sexual manipulation of the clitoris,¹⁷ although she purposely stops prematurely leaving Areusa aroused and more distraught than she found her. Mabbe positions Areusa and Celestina as adversaries—the reluctant whore and the aggressive bawd—who use "the Mother" alternately as defense against sexual coercion and excuse for erotic contact. In that way, Mabbe conflates aberrant eroticism (prostitution, erotic excess, female homoeroticism) and physical disease.

Mabbe left little doubt about the specific nature of Celestina's fondling, providing clear textual evidence of its sexual character. Areusa asks Celestina to "Lay your hand higher up towards my stomacke" (sig. M4v). Therefore, Celestina must be touching Areusa's mons or rubbing her clitoris, masturbating the younger woman, whom she finds "so faire, so cleare, so fresh, so fragrant, so delicate, so dainty a creature" (sig. M4v). The sexual action terminates when Celestina berates Areusa for her selfishness and intimidates her into seeing Parmeno. As an experienced bawd, Celestina sexually stimulates Areusa so that she can provoke her to accept a male partner. Despite her ultimate focus on heterosexual interests, as Gregory S. Hutcheson has argued, Celestina's actions in the scene point to a conceptual understanding of female homoerotic desire and acknowledge the existence of homosexual practices.¹⁸

Celestina uses sexual excitement and arousal to coerce Areusa's behavior the way Corsica used affection to manipulate Amarillis. These predatory characters assert an erotic control over the women in their power. However, in the pastoral world of *Il Pastor Fido* erotic manipulation remains on the level of emotion. Corsica victimizes Amarillis by appealing to friendship, devotion, and female regard suffused with homoerotic interest. In contrast, Celestina exhibits a coarser and more pungent form of homoeroticism in the tragic, *The Spanish Bawd*. Against a backdrop of urban squalor and indigence, Mabbe equates the fecundity of sexual ripeness to disease and contamination. The contagious lust that swirls around the decrepit Celestina and infects the men and women she encounters dooms them all to a tragic end. While playwrights such as Mabbe use a form like closet tragedy to indulge their construction of sexual degradation, the refined world of pastoral romance only allows Dymock to flirt with erotic corruption.

III CONSTRUCTIONS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

These homoerotic manipulations, of course, are related to issues of power and dominance, as Bruster stated. Sexual interest and attraction can be tools of control in the hands of a predatory character and have the potential to generate acts of sexual violence. That connection between passion and power is evident in J. Rickets's Latin comedy *Byrsa Basilea* (1633). In this romantic disguise comedy, the heroine Virginia runs off with her lover Emporius, unaware that he is the man her uncle has been negotiating for her to marry. Disguised as Cosmopolities, Emporius attracts the attention of Virginia's aunt Heronia. Heronia falls so madly in love with the young man that when she hears of the couple's escape, she flies into a rage, threatening the absent Cosmopolities with: "this treachery will cost you dearly! I'll deflower Virginia for you" (4.5.2026).¹⁹ Heronia's anger and frustration fuel her desire for sexual conquest. She wishes to strike at Cosmopolities by eliminating Virginia's attractiveness and value as a pure sexual object. Tamora is similarly motivated to take Lavinia's "honey," but unlike Tamora, who uses her sons to accomplish the task, Heronia vows to enact the rape herself. Jealousy drives her outburst and her intention is all the more obscene given the incestuous nature of her relation to Virginia. While Rickets does not represent the specific physical action of female-female rape in his play, the line is noteworthy for its implication of sexual violence. Here, the scenario of sexual assault is suggested but not explicitly fulfilled, just as sexual

acts are always implied but never enacted in other more romantic constructions of female homoeroticism.

James Shirley also constructs a female–female rape scenario, although in more graphic detail, in his play, *The Bird in a Cage* (1633). In the text, Donella, playing Jupiter to Eugenia's Danaë, becomes sexually aroused to the point where she believes she would have committed Jupiter's rape of Danaë on Eugenia's body: "and you had not wak'd as you did Madam, I should ha' forgot my selfe and play'd Jupiter indeed with you, my imaginations were strong upon me; and you lay so sweetly" (sig. H2v).²⁰ Shirley toys with his spectator, presenting homoerotic abandon within the heterosexual construct of the scene before the moment of the presumed rape. With the other women gone to "sleepe," the "wanton" (sig. H2) Donella spends nearly thirty lines in sensual preparation, describing the beauty of Danaë while she fondles and kisses Eugenia, ("Let Jove heavenly Nectar sip. / And translate by kissing thee / Into thy breast his Deity") and is about to "rifle other greater Blissess" (sig. H2v) when an arrival interrupts the scene.²¹ While the text denies Donella the gratification of rifling blissful pleasures from Eugenia, it does allow her a great amount of erotic latitude and displays female subjects in a physically erotic situation: Donella is about to "Leave off . . . these flattering Kisses" that are "but the Gate of Pleasure" because "elizium" lies "within" Eugenia (sig. H2v). Like the midwife in Aretino, Donella finds the female body sexually exciting—the image of Eugenia laying "so sweetly" aroused her as much as her own imagination—especially since she has been confined with Eugenia and her waiting women without any male company. Shirley's scenario of female homoeroticism seems to refer to Nicholas de Nicolay's description of female Turkish baths and suggests male fantasies of how women confined together spend their time.

Similarly, Thomas Heywood takes violent sexual imagery as far as any playwright might in *The Golden Age* (1609–11) when Jupiter, disguised as a virago, rapes Calisto in Diana's all-female community. The scene begins by displaying the cross-dressed Jupiter kissing and fondling Calisto. When she objects, he argues that "so a woman with a woman may" (sig. E2v).²² Of course, the extent to which Jupiter's disguise represents him as female determines the homoerotic impact possible in the scene. If presented as a perhaps androgynous virago fondling Calisto, the image on stage might depict sexual violence between women. However, the male persona never really subsides as Jupiter constantly refers to his male identity. The imagery may suggest female–female sexual violence, but the audience remain aware that

Jupiter is male and that mitigates the homoerotic potential of the scene. However, the comment that women may kiss and fondle other women, and the exclusivity of Diana's community suggests that in certain circumstances women enjoyed great sexual freedoms with one another.

In *Byrsa Basilica*, *The Bird in a Cage*, and *The Golden Age*, Rickets, Shirley, and Heywood suggest various constructs of female–female sexual violence within diverse scenarios—the promise of female same-sex rape, female impersonation of a male character during the enactment of a mythological rape, and an attempted rape by a male character impersonating a woman. The texts do not encode any of the female characters involved in these scenarios as homoerotically inclined. Heronia does not desire Virginia; she desires revenge. A complex mix of absence and mimesis motivates Donella when the frustration of her imposed chastity feeds her imagination—although she is the character who takes the most pleasure from her homoerotic encounter. Jupiter, of course, is not a woman at all. However, each situation relies on the awareness of sexual aggression between women, and presents, through a careful manipulation of characters and events, the potential of female homosexual assault. It is not difficult to imagine Heronia making good on her threat to “deflower” Virginia if the latter had not escaped. Nor would a spectator familiar with Aretino, Brantôme, Montaigne, or Estienne have been unaware of how Heronia might accomplish the act. The humor of this moment in Rickets's play is not that Heronia desires an impossible event, but that Virginia's absence prevents her from achieving her goal—Heronia's frustrated anger becomes comic. Shirley's play is similar in that Donella might very well use Eugenia sexually except that the entrance of Rolliardo in the birdcage precludes her actions. The comedy in Shirley's play issues from Donella's sexual frustration, not from some assumed impracticality in her attempt. While each playwright defers or converts the sexual violence suggested in their play and thus avoids abrogation of their text, they present the potential of a homoerotic fantasy for the audience to fulfill imagistically.²³

IV AGGRESSION VERSUS FEMALE AMITY

Playwrights in early modern England navigated between acceptable manifestations of female homoerotic desire and its condemnation. They could construct playfully erotic scenarios between women untainted by negative signification, or anxiously trouble their constructions, or, as the evidence in this chapter demonstrates, vilify sexual attraction between female characters. Playwrights could also construct more

than one scenario in a text. *The Female Rebellion*, written sometime between 1657 and 1659 but never staged, juxtaposes the incivility of homoeroticism against the amity of female friendship.²⁴ The narrative concerns the Amazon Queen Orithya and a plot to overthrow her orchestrated by three malcontent Amazonian generals: Antiopa, Penthesilea, and Celeno. Her fair cousin Nicostrate, who pretends to join the rebellion as a means to extinguish it, supports Orithya. The text not only contrasts Nicostrate's loyalty with the rebels' infidelity, but also highlights those positions through opposing constructions of female attachment—acceptable affection versus inappropriate eroticism.

The Amazonian guard envy Nicostrate, the queen's favorite, and imply that more than familial affection exists between the two women. Nicostrate understands the erotic perceptions that adhere to her relationship with Orithya and uses that against the rebels to infiltrate their ranks. Claiming she hates the queen for making her the court favorite, Nicostrate vows to set the palace on fire "more joyfully than ever spouse did light / Her Nuptial torch" (3.2.40–41).²⁵ Nicostrate confirms the sexual arrangement the Amazons presume exists between herself and Orithya, nurturing their insecurities and prejudices so that she can stem the tide of rebellion. By disfiguring herself, and blaming the injury on Sagalius, a Scythian ruler who supports the Amazon Queen, Nicostrate further ingratiates herself with the rebel force. They willingly believe that Sagalius, envious that Orithya loves her, has attacked Nicostrate: "He had slain me, / But that he thought this shameful guise and sorrow / Would prove more tedious executioners; / These looks making my Love as scorn'd as his" (4.3.141–44). The audience, unaware of Nicostrate's true allegiance, is led to believe that she and Orithya are sexual partners and Sagalius is a jealous, unrequited lover of the queen. In the end, Nicostrate's stratagem helps defeat the rebellion and reveals her fidelity—she is bound to Orithya by duty, devotion, and familial love.

The villains in the text are the politically calculating Antiopa and petulant Penthesilea. They foment rebellion through dissent and disorder, stooping to regicide when their civic intrigue crumbles. The text reveals that their political corruption corresponds to the moral degradation of their erotic proclivities. After entombing both Orithya and Sagalius, Antiopa and Penthesilea celebrate their victory, believing the Amazon army supports them. Antiopa says, "Come, lets embrace till our souls kiss each other." This suggestive remark and the curious stage direction "[Ant. & Pen Hug closely]" (5.2.21) imply that these two women, who earlier disparaged sexual relations with men, are lovers. Women might hug, but to hug "closely" so that their

“souls kiss each other” connotes a sexual dimension. The action seems more physically erotic than emotionally affectionate. Their relationship, which dissolves into petty viciousness at their capture, provides a contrast to the estimable affection between Nicostrate and Orithya.

The text, in fact, juxtaposes the two couples against each other. On one hand, the Amazons accuse Nicostrate and Orithya of improper affection and their belief increases civil discontent among the Amazons. Jealous innuendo fuels accusations that the queen and Nicostrate are lovers. In reality, they are devoted friends with a strong familial bond. The script ultimately celebrates their virtuous relationship. On the other hand, the text initially presents Penthesilea and Antiopa as asexual comrades, but eventually demonstrates the sexual nature of their relationship. The play suggests that rebellion and murder come naturally to women with deviant sexual interests. Since Penthesilea and Antiopa are the play’s villains and Nicostrate and Orithya are its heroines, then the text constructs homoerotic desire as immoral and platonic friendship as exemplary. In *The Female Rebellion*, amiable loving friendship supports civil order while perverse inclination leads to discord and anarchy.

The playwright ultimately situates social harmony within a heterosexual paradigm, but not before baiting his audience with one final allusion to female homoeroticism. Orithya’s government has been insecure partly because of her staunch refusal to produce an heir, and the final moments of the play find her again threatened with civil unrest unless she agrees to marry and bear a child. Even Nicostrate questions why Orithya continues to put her country in jeopardy by refusing to wed. Surprisingly, Orithya declares that she has rejected male suitors because of Nicostrate. The text momentarily implies that the Amazons have been correct all along, that Orithya loves Nicostrate and has deferred marriage because of that love. However, the ironic titillation of her statement evaporates when Orithya explains that her self-imposed barrenness insured that the throne would revert to Nicostrate, who she believes to be the rightful monarch. When an older Amazon proves Orithya the true hereditary monarch, both she and Nicostrate take Scythian husbands, ostensibly purging any suspicion of their homoerotic affinity. *The Female Rebellion* follows the argument set forth by John Bridges seventy years earlier in his defense of female government, that women have every right to rule as long as they accept the authority of men in sexual relationships: Nicostrate and Orithya do, while Antiopa and Penthesilea do not.

Sir William Davenant’s “opera” *The Siege of Rhodes* parts 1 and 2 (1656–59) also juxtaposes platonic female friendship with homoerotic

desire, although he situates both constructs within the same relationship. In Davenant's work, predatory erotic manipulations conceal or trouble homoerotic connections between women. Scenes of sexual coercion and erotic control between the two heroines, Ianthe and Roxolana, provide engaging and energetic moments in the text. The popularity of Davenant's production insured that it became a staple in the Restoration repertoire where Mary Betterton and Hester Davenport would play the female roles.²⁶ Female as well as male valor, magnanimous nobility, and the psychological conquest of personal jealousy characterize this heroic drama, perhaps the first of its kind.²⁷ At the center of the plot is Ianthe, the Sicilian wife of Alphonso, who sells her jewels, charters several ships at arms, and sails to the besieged Rhodes to be reunited with her husband. Ianthe's virtue earns the respect and admiration of Solyman, the conquering Turkish sultan, which disturbs both their suspicious spouses. Solyman's wife, Roxolana, torn between a rivalrous envy and adoration of Ianthe, becomes the sinister figure of Davenant's heroic romance.

Roxolana and Solyman are a tortured couple, deeply in love but separated by conflicting political and familial obligations. An already angry Roxolana grows more resentful when Ianthe travels to the Turkish camp to sue for a Rhodian peace. By part 2 of Davenant's text, Roxolana's jealousy has reached such a fevered pitch that she contemplates murdering Ianthe. However, the beauty of a sleeping Ianthe so captivates her that Roxolana, poniard in hand, is unable to strike a blow. Instead, in an anxious scene of erotic intrigue, she tests Ianthe's chastity by delivering a supposed present from Solyman—a sensual kiss—and is surprised at Ianthe's moral restraint and integrity. Davenant constructs the two women as opposites: Ianthe is domestic and submissive; Roxolana exotic and dominant. Like Voada in Daborne's *Christian Turn'd Turke*, Roxolana exhibits an assertive errant sexuality, rendering her an eroticized female "other" in contrast with Ianthe, a model of Christian purity.

Roxolana vows to comfort and assist her captive after Ianthe manages to allay Roxolana's suspicions about her relationship with Solyman. However, the offer of friendship that Roxolana proffers also reflects a sensuous homoeroticism:

Roxolana [to Ianthe]: You must not at such distance stand;
 Draw near, and give me your fair hand.—
 I have another Present for you now;
 And such a Present as I know
 You will much better than the first allow;

Though Solyman will not esteem it so.
 Tis from my self—of friendship such a Seal—
 As you to Solyman must ne'r reveal.—
 And that I may be more assur'd,
 By this agen you are conjur'd.— (4.3.132–41)²⁸ Kisses her.

Roxolana replaces the kiss from Solyman with one of her own and binds Ianthe in an erotic contract that manifests signs of dominance and submission.

Ianthe feels she should receive Roxolana's "presents" down on her "knees" (4.3.143)—the pure-hearted submissive offering reverence to her mistress. This sealing of vows by kissing becomes a motif in the relationship between the two. In their second meeting, Roxolana attempts to console a grieving Ianthe by reminding her of the "presents" she bestowed on the woman. But Roxolana quickly exchanges comforting reassurance for psychological distress as she tortures Ianthe with news of Alphonso's capture and vows to execute him for the discord he caused between her and Solyman. Ianthe in turn desperately reminds Roxolana that she sealed her promise of friendship with her "pretious Lipps" (5.6.69), apparently expecting such a vow to have greater currency. But Roxolana only pretended to break her oath, and this second successful test of Ianthe's character makes Roxolana "renew" her pledge and "seal it faster" with a final kiss (5.6.90). This successive contact, like the female–female kiss in Shirley's *The Doubtful Heir*, displays the erotic energy between female bodies in the visual arena of onstage action. Davenant uses Roxolana's exoticism, her violent passion, to construct an uneasy allegiance between the two. Roxolana is the dominant mistress, subdued by Ianthe's beauty but Ianthe is the submissive captive controlled by an erotic force.

The characteristic that distinguishes most of the plays in this chapter is the erotic manipulation of one woman by another. Greed might motivate a predatory figure such as Celestina and Lucar, whose financial gain is dependent on the women they seduce and coerce into prostitution. Jealousy also provokes predatory characters such as Corsica, Forsaken, Heronia, or Roxolana, whose envy of another woman over the affection of a man compels them to use sexual violence or coercion to attack and manipulate their perceived rivals. These women use emotional affection, erotic seduction, sexual attraction, physical stimulation, and threaten sexual violence to control, coerce, and exploit women who are generally younger, more virtuous, and less socially or sexually sophisticated than themselves. All the plays discussed here use female homoerotics to signify the moral depravity

of characters that transgress social and civic order. Even Donella, the least subversive character in the group, falls into wanton aggression and is seen by her colleagues as slightly aberrant. Other figures contemplate or perform acts of murder and rape, or engage in activities equated with a kind of sexual slavery. *The Female Rebellion*, which contrasts a female-female sexual relationship with female same-sex affection and scripts the former as villainous most clearly indicates the immorality and corruption of female homoeroticism. Platonic love, affection, loyalty, and devotion are acceptable between women, but erotic energy and sexual contact are not, which is why so many playwrights in other chapters only suggest or imply erotic connections between women and construct them within safe heterosexual narratives. If they constructed those relationships more overtly, they would be constrained to condemn them.

The plays discussed in chapters 2 and 3 demonstrate the subtextual nature of female homoeroticism in early modern English drama. Appearing from the space where character and disguise merge, its construction rests primarily on the cross-dressed female role. However, in this chapter plays such as Mabbe's *The Spanish Bawd*, along with other works like Wilson's *The Three Ladies of London*, present an interesting dichotomy between female homoerotic expressions in texts that employ cross-dressed characters and those that do not. On one hand, only when characters such as Rosalind, Callidora, and Kate Low-water are dressed as men are they allowed to flirt openly with other women without sustaining negative significations for their actions. In fact, most often, disguised heroines attempt to avoid or deflect the amorous interests of other female characters. Shakespeare is especially circumspect about his female characters, relegating the homoerotic subtext exclusively to a desire directed at the cross-dressed female figure, but not specifically issuing from that character. (Rosalind and Viola might enjoy their positions as objects of women's desires, but neither acts on that position with as much gusto as Dorothea, Kate, or Callidora.)²⁹ The ambiguity of the cross-dressed woman in the imaginative plane of drama gives her the freedom to appear in scenarios of homoerotic tension and remain the sympathetic heroine. Only the cross-dressed Forsaken demonstrates an illicit use of her disguise, which affords a contrast to the dramaturgical device as used by other playwrights, including Cavendish herself, to construct more playful scenarios, and proves the rule that playwrights manipulated the convention for benign effect.

On the other hand, Celestina's overt seduction of Areusa and Lucar's of Conscience present them as the "real lesbians," figures of

ridicule and reproof fully befitting their villainous characterizations and harsh punishments. Parmeno eventually murders Celestina, her death providing the “profitable instruction” promised on the play’s title page. Lucar meets a similar fate. When finally brought to judgment for her crimes, Lucar pleads not guilty, expecting corroboration from the devoted Conscience, who, instead, lives up to her name and condemns both Lucar and herself. Conscience is merely sent to prison for her transgressions while Lucar is sentenced to “the place of darcknesse” (sig. F3)—an allegorical hell. Moral condemnation falls on the predatory sexual transgressor and she suffers a spiritual punishment.³⁰ Unlike conventional female characters whose cross-dressed disguise leads them into homoerotic encounters unwillingly, playfully, or compassionately, Lucar and Celestina are mature women aware of the sexual implications in their speech and actions who prey on younger innocent women through homoerotic manipulations.³¹ Unlike the disguised heroine, whose circumstances necessitate her cross-dressing which in turn leads to the sexual confusion of the desiring subject, predatory characters willfully engage in homoerotic seductions for their own profit.

CHAPTER 5



UTOPIAN LESBIAN EROTICS

The preceding chapters have examined textual representations of female homoeroticism that imply a resignation toward imaginative constructs of love and desire. The same-sex erotic entanglements constructed in these early modern plays are associative, not concrete, embodiments of female–female desire. That is, playwrights constructed female homoeroticism in a space where no real, or only mistaken and misdirected, affection exists. However, a large body of drama, nearly twenty of the seventy-plus plays in this study, presents less ambiguous and more affirmative constructions of female homoerotic desire. The varied erotic relationships and affectional dispositions in these plays tend to celebrate bonds between women and express female romantic couplings as idealistic unions—offering a utopian vision of female homoerotic desire. Utopian female homoeroticism is utopian in the sense that playwrights effectively align female characters to other female figures in open and often idealized relationships, even arguing strenuously on occasion in favor of female–female love. In these plays, the desired figure might actually be a man in disguise, but the desiring subject perceives only a female presence and believes she loves another woman. The visual perspective of two romantically entwined feminine forms celebrates female homoerotic desire. These plays construct female characters conscious of their attraction to other female bodies. While the plays are no more sexually explicit than other constructs of same-sex desire, they advance a critical awareness of same-sex erotic attachments between women. In social alliance, erotic play, and romantic liaisons, the female characters in these plays gravitate toward unions with other women.

Ovid's myth of Iphis and Ianthe provides an embryonic model for the utopian ideal of love between two women. Iphis, raised as a boy but fully aware that she is a woman, finds herself not only betrothed to Ianthe, but passionately in love with her childhood friend. The only dramatic version of the story by an English writer to have survived is Henry Bellamy's Latin manuscript, written while he was a student at St. John's College, Oxford, sometime between 1621 and 1633.¹ The Stationers' Register of 1660 also lists *Iphis & Iantha, or a marriage without a man* as the title of a play licensed in 1613 and, probably erroneously, attributes the work to Shakespeare. The eventual loss of the text leaves only frustrated speculation about its possible content.

Bellamy's otherwise faithful rendering of the original story adds one plot complication, the comic villain Nisus. Unfortunately, Bellamy's text shows Iphis and Ianthe together only once as Iphis rejects the woman she desires in an effort to free Ianthe for what she assumes will be a more sexually fulfilling heterosexual match. Iphis, like her Ovidian predecessor, thinks her love is unnatural—"Never does a woman set passion aflame in another woman, except in my case" (4.5).² However, like so many representations of female homoeroticism in early modern drama, their attraction issues from similarity and agreement, which provides a strong foundation for their relationship. Even her father, Lygdus, considers the match between Iphis and Ianthe in those terms:

Do they not both have an eager desire and do like interests not promise compatible minds? Because of this their bond of marriage will be tighter, and their fervent passion will burn the greater. Besides these things, a similar look embellishes the countenance of each, and their eyes emit similar gleams. (3.7)

Lygdus declares that Iphis and Ianthe, born on the same day, share a "mutual passion" and are destined for one another (3.7). He suggests that their corresponding thoughts and interests will make them better lovers and he seems to echo Donne's poem of Sappho and Philaenis: "the likenes beinge such, / Why should they not alike in all parts touch?" Other texts in this chapter also define similitude as the essence of female-female relationships.

Bellamy also emphasizes the homoerotic nature of the attraction Ianthe feels by stressing the feminine characteristics Iphis displays. Everyone in the play, concerned about a lack of manly fortitude in Iphis, obsesses over her beauty, artistic abilities, and feminine proclivities. Fundamentally, Ianthe actually falls in love with Iphis for her

feminine qualities, despite her outward male appearance. Bellamy's text focuses on the intense, intrinsic bond between female characters, which transcends the moral imperative that supposedly separates women as lovers. In fact, although Bellamy cites moral opinion—"Does any god / join tender women on the same marriage bed? . . . / The gods greatly fear this unspeakable evil" (5.6)—he invests the criticism with little merit by assigning the objection to the incompetent and intellectually suspect Nisus. The love between Iphis and Ianthe yields to neither rivals nor social convention.

Scholarship on female homoerotics in drama has tended to focus on utopian plays, partly because Shakespearean drama is highly represented among the works, but also as an historical reclamation of a modern pejorative. By identifying early modern examples of love and affection between women, even between female literary characters, scholars rescue female-female eroticism from evasion or conservative condemnation and expose the process of its denigration over time. Valerie Traub has identified erotic connections between characters such as Rosalind and Celia, Helena and Hermia, and Emilia and Flavina that exist outside the mediated frame of the cross-dressed heroine—a desire she classifies as *femme-femme* love.³ However, even some of these projects qualify female homoerotic images as patriarchal projects. For example, Traub argues that the desire represented between two traditionally feminine women was socially acceptable onstage only as long as it eventually gave way to the reproductive demands of marriage and patriarchal authority.⁴ In a discussion of the same characters, Douglas Bruster maintains that "the erotic content" of these scenes "exceeds the relations they describe, and even escapes the speakers themselves."⁵ Bruster contrasts the sensuality of female affectional speeches with assertions by the characters of purity and innocence, concluding that the erotic content resonates only with the audience and is not felt as such by the characters.⁶ He argues that playwrights constructed homoerotic scenarios for the audience to enjoy, but that the characters do not identify with that desire in the world of the play. Both Traub and Bruster see these relationships as subject to patriarchal control both within and outside the text itself.

In contrast, Theodora Jankowski has written that female friendships, and the bonds between mistress and servant, can be construed in erotic and transgressive terms, especially when the characters exist in "essentially woman-only space."⁷ She reads the relationships between Paulina and Hermione, Portia and Nerissa, Titania and her votress, Cleopatra and her maids Iras and Charmian, and Beatrice and Hero as homoerotically encoded. In these various Shakespearean

relationships, alliance between women becomes the emblem of erotic agreement. Rosalind and Celia's "loves / Are dearer than the natural bond of sisters" (1.2.275–76).⁸ Helena and Hermia are "like to a double cherry, . . . / Two lovely berries moulded on one stem: / . . . two seeming bodies, but one heart" (3.2.209, 211–12). Paulina has kept the wrongly convicted Hermione safe in her "remov'd house" for sixteen years where she has visited her "privately twice or thrice a day" (5.2.107, 105). Within these relationships, Jankowski reads a homoerotic construct that posits female–female eroticism as a sustaining force outside of patriarchal control and authority.

The case of Emilia from Shakespeare and Fletcher's *The Two Noble Kinsmen* (1613) is of particular note. Although plays in the Shakespearean canon usually render female homoerotic desire innocuous by the end of the text, Richard Mallette has argued that *The Two Noble Kinsmen* instead subjugates heterosexual desire and does not celebrate marriage.⁹ Similarly, Laurie Shannon has pointed out that in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* female homoerotics are "positively coded as utopian" while marriage is equated with tyranny and the irrational.¹⁰ Indeed, the trajectory of the play moves Emilia from her contented single life to the misery of a forced marriage and seemingly critiques the kind of patriarchal authority that requires women to sever homoerotic relations. Early in the action, the Amazon nostalgically remembers her friendship with Flavina and the erotic innocence of their bodily adornments. In her reverie, Emilia contends that "the true love 'tween maid and maid may be / More than in sex [dividual]" (1.3.81–82).¹¹ However, Emilia is not merely moribund with sentimental longing for a lost adolescent friendship. Shakespeare and Fletcher take pains to assert Emilia's affectional predisposition toward members of her own sex. Her "persuasion"—what Hippolyta equates to a "sickly appetite"—makes her affirm that she will never "love any that's call'd man" (1.3.91, 89, 85).

In a clever juxtaposition to the dissolution of male friendship, *The Two Noble Kinsmen* presents an erotic agreement between Emilia and her waiting-woman that also demonstrates her "persuasion." Alone in a garden, but watched by the increasingly jealous Palamon and Arcite, mistress and servant discuss men, affection, and, echoing Emilia's reminiscence of the loved Flavina, floral ornamentation. As they retreat inside, Emilia's waiting-woman, whom she has just accused of being "wanton," decides to "lie down." (2.2.146, 151). When Emilia asks her companion if she will take someone with her, she implies that she would like to be that person. The intimate garden setting with its "world of pleasures"; the confined, frustrated male presence;

the declaration of wantonness; and Emilia's already identified "persuasion" insinuate a sexual liaison between the two (2.2.118). The young Amazon jovially seduces her waiting-woman. For Richard Abrams, this scene not only confirms Emilia's "sexual preference," but also troubles notions of conventional sexuality—two men, having just declared themselves "one another's wife" (2.2. 80), become bitter rivals for the affection of a woman who "shall never . . . / Love any that's call'd man" (1.3.84–85).¹² Desire is not bound by a static heterosexual attraction of opposites, but courses fluidly between variant sexual arrangements. Even more important, the play ultimately critiques heterosexual passions as destructive and suggests that homoeroticism presents a superior form of love.

While *The Two Noble Kinsmen* establishes a utopian ideal, two plays already discussed in chapter 4, Thomas Heywood's *The Golden Age* (1609–11) and Dymock's translation of *Il Pastor Fido*, identify a larger network of female same-sex affinity.¹³ The wonderful kissing war in *Il Pastor Fido*, (also sensually illustrated by Anthony van Dyck), describes a group of women competing to see which of them "can kisse sweetliest" (sig. Elv).¹⁴ The contest, suggested as practice for heterosexual encounters, is a pastoral orgy of same-sex eroticism begun as a "fight confused" (sig. Elv) until the nymphs choose a judge amongst themselves. Amarillis, their choice, kisses each of the nymphs in turn, but declares the disguised Mirtillo superior to the women. The scene suggests that women eagerly find sensual pleasure in homoerotic activities even as it asserts a heterosexual standard over the homoerotic reverie of the described action. Heywood's *The Golden Age* also depicts a proprietary female environment, as Valerie Traub discusses in her landmark work the "(in)significance of 'lesbian' Desire in Early Modern England."¹⁵ Heywood's text presents an idyllic female community devoted to the goddess Diana in which women pair off in monogamous couples. They must forswear the company of "hated man," and agree to "consort" with women "at board and bed" (sig. Elv).¹⁶ When Calisto enters this society all the women are so "twin'd in love" that none "will be wonne to change her bed-fellow" (sig. D4v). In Diana's sect, women form exclusive attachments with one another in a protective society of female affinity. As Traub argues, Calisto's tragedy is that a forced male sexual encounter, Jupiter's rape, expels her from this conclave of women. Jupiter voices a different and heterosexually biased ideology when he tells Calisto that women "are nothing without men" and that Diana's order is a "heresie," a "schisme" not worthy Calisto's "respect" (sig. D2v, D3). And yet, Calisto ignores these arguments and refuses to marry Jupiter or accept his help.

Heywood, like Shakespeare, seems to critique the male disruption of homosocial and homoerotic unions between women.

In the examples given here, utopian female–female relationships emerge in confined women-inclusive communities, in the nostalgic longing of adolescent remembrance, and in the affinity between female characters. This chapter continues to look at similar utopian relationships between female characters and focuses on constructs in which one woman expresses her love for another, or for a person she believes is female. Many of these texts construct female homoeroticism as a desire commensurate with heterosexuality and seem bent on affirming erotic alliances between women rather than replacing homoerotic attachments with heterosexual unions. Still, while these plays construct female homoerotic tensions, they generally deny sexual fulfillment in female–female relationships. In addition, heterosexual unions eventually transpire at the conclusion of most of these plays, especially in the various dramas that depict male-to-female cross-dressed heroes who win the love of women. Nonetheless, these plays in particular trouble facile assumptions about sexual attraction and heterosexual supremacy, and like Emilia in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, several depict definite “persuasions” for female same-sex relationships. More importantly, rather than depicting women who abandon their homoerotic affections and bonds in favor of heterosexual commitments, these plays portray women who accommodate heterosexual alliances within their already established homoerotic relationships.

I AFFIRMATIVE EROTIC ALLIANCES BETWEEN WOMEN

Both Sidney’s *Arcadia* and Honoré d’Urfé’s *L’Astrée* provided source material for dramatic constructions of female homoeroticism. Leonard Willan faithfully adapted stories from d’Urfé in his Interregnum closet drama *Astraea* (1651), while John Day’s *The Isle of Guls* (1606), Shirley’s *The Arcadia* (1640), and the anonymous manuscript play *Love’s Changelings Change* (1630–40), all followed Sidney’s romance.¹⁷ Unfortunately, none of the *Arcadia* adaptations focus attention on the desiring subject’s anguish over her supposed homoerotic attraction to the extent that Sidney’s original heroine does. Instead, they tend to ignore or repress homoerotic longings. Still, these plays are notable because of the homoerotic constructions in their source material. *Love’s Changelings Change* comes closest to presenting the homoerotic intrigue in Sidney’s prose romance.¹⁸ The anonymous author gives some indication that Philoclea is erotically

drawn to the Amazon when she agrees to “conforme” to Zelmane’s interests out of love, and fears that even if they could live like sisters, marriage might still separate them:

Yes and to what so ere you doe I will
 Conforme my selfe wood an wee lov’d wee still
 Might live like two sweete Nymphes together
 Yet soe an other might participate
 My lovely happines or wood you were
 My sister that some linke should ty our [—] harte
 yet marriage at length would breake that ty
 I wood you were a man or I noe woman (2.1.1099–106)¹⁹

Philoclea believes that for her happiness to be complete one of them would have to change sex. Neither Shirley nor Day goes even this far in their adaptations.

Of the three texts based on the *Arcadia*, Shirley’s play is the closest to its source material.²⁰ Pyrocles disguises himself as the Amazon warrior Zelmane in order to court Philoclea whose father Basilius has moved his entire court to the country. Basilius was warned by an oracle that his daughter “shall with natures blisse embrace / An uncoch love, which nature hateth most” (sig. B1v).²¹ Here again, a playwright alerts his audience to homoerotic attractions by invoking the immorality of such desire. As in the source, not only does Philoclea fall in love with Zelmane, but so do her father and mother Gynecia (although she, unlike her husband and daughter, knows that the Amazon is actually Pyrocles). Notably, nowhere in the play does a mournful Philoclea lament the impossibility of female–female sexual fulfillment or resolve to love the Amazon despite that supposed impediment. While Sidney allows his Philoclea a moment of triumphant determination in which she vows to love Zelmane if the Amazon will have her, Shirley allows only a vestige of that declaration. His Philoclea merely tells Pyrocles that she loved him even when she thought he was a woman, and that in her dreams Zelmane was her “harmelesse bedfellow” (sig. F2v). The homoerotics of Shirley’s play pales in comparison to Philoclea’s sexual confusion in the original.

If Shirley’s play restricts the utopian construct of homoerotic desire, it does offer a visual reference of female–female sexuality. As Zelmane, Pyrocles courts Philoclea, and in turn, Gynecia courts him. Shirley might have even been titillating that segment of the audience unfamiliar with Sidney’s romance by hiding Zelmane’s identity until the second act. If so, certain speeches of Zelmane’s must have seemed

curious, at least, to the audience. What would they make of the Amazon declaring, "Thou art cruell / To an innocent bosome love, there is no way / Within thy power to save me, oh Philoclea / Where shall I coole my heart, oh if there be / One shaft can kill, good Cupid ayme at me" (sig. C1v). For a spectator unaware of the disguise, the initial attraction that Zelmane displays for Philoclea and Gynecia for Zelmane presents a narrative in which women show themselves sexually attracted to other women.

In *The Isle of Guls*, John Day approaches this tragicomic romance with a healthy dose of satire and extends the comic elements of the narrative. To that end, both Basilius and Gynecia are aware of the other's attraction to the Amazon, and both ridicule the other for indulging in what they perceive to be homoerotic attractions. However, Day carefully imbues the Philoclea character, called Violetta, with skepticism about Zelmane's sex. Violetta's cynicism and intelligence contrasts with the innocence of other Philocleas, and the play uses homoerotic attraction for comic effect to ridicule the sexual excesses of old age. In general, the play disapproves of same-sex attraction, as evidenced by Gynecia's reaction when she learns that Zelmane is indeed a man: "I knew my judgement could not be deceivd, / Nor durst proud love have done me so much wrong / To cast my thoughts unto a womans eye" (sig. D1v).²² Surprisingly, none of the dramatic adaptations of Sidney improved on the homoerotic construct in the original, and, in fact, discount or corrupt the pathos of female same-sex longing and restrain the affirmation of a homoerotic union as Sidney presented it.

Leonard Willan, however, does not suppress the homoerotic constructs in his pastoral source material. In fact, given the breadth and multiple stories of d'Urfé's *L'Astrée*, Willan must have consciously chosen to accent the female homoeroticism he found in the original romance by focusing on those narratives in his play. Two stories figure prominently in Willan's drama: the contest between Phillis and Sylvander for the hand of Diana, and the love of Astrea for Alexis. In her analysis of d'Urfé, Louise K. Horowitz explored the polymorphous eroticism in these two plot strands and emphasized the homoerotic potential in each. About the Diana/Phillis/Sylvander episode she writes, "All three levels—female friendship, heterosexual courtship, homosexual relationship—coexist in the narrative, none allowed to come to fruition, but none denied textual status."²³ In Willan's version, Phillis pursues Diana in a homoerotic scenario that no other playwright has imagined, while the Astrea story echoes the conventions of mistaken identity that issue from cross-dressing.

Willan's drama follows Astrea through her complicated and shifting relationship with the shepherd Celadon. Late in the action, in order to escape from the adoring Galatæa and be near Astrea, Celadon dresses as Alexis, the daughter of the druid Adamas. Astrea becomes enamored of Alexis, partly because of her resemblance to the shepherd she spurned and now thinks is dead. When she comes upon the sleeping form of Alexis, Astrea cannot restrain herself from kissing the "girl," although she finds the action frustrating because the dozing figure does not respond. Astrea may be drawn to Alexis because she reminds Astrea of Celadon, but Astrea directs her erotic interest at the character specifically because she thinks Alexis is a woman. When Celadon, who admits being jealous of his disguise and envies "Alexis," identifies himself as the disguised druid girl, Astrea is furious with Celadon for accepting her erotic advances. Astrea loves Alexis with more abandon, more ease, and more sexual pleasure than she ever shows Celadon.

Phillis displays an even more overt homoerotic affection in her rivalry with Sylvander for the affection of Diana. Both have agreed, for different reasons, to a challenge proving which is the better lover, with Diana as the judge. Over the course of several scenes, Phillis competes with Sylvander to win Diana's love. The courtship begins immediately when Phillis kisses Diana to signal her acceptance of the challenge. This female challenger is no retiring lover, and Sylvander becomes jealous of her erotic assertiveness and Diana's response to her. The contest concludes in the third act after both Phillis and Sylvander present persuasive speeches that promote their merits. Phillis argues that since "Loves proper being" issues from "Equality and Sympathy" then "resemblance in Sexe" gives her the strongest claim to Diana (sig. F2).²⁴ Besides arguing that women are suited to one another through their similarity, she also claims that women deserve female lovers since women are the fairer sex. Sylvander counters that nature favors difference rather than likeness in relationships; therefore, heterosexual unions are preferable to homoerotic ones. Diana refuses to choose between the two, granting that both excel at different aspects of love. Although Sylvander provokes Phillis into courting Diana, and both women are heterosexually coupled by the end of the play, Phillis presents an exceptionally strong and prescient defense of homoerotic desire. Furthermore, the dialectic that Willan constructs between homo- and heteroerotic love ends in a draw and Willan argues, through Diana, that these are correspondent forms of love.

One final scene from *Astrea* bears mention. Although Phillis, Diana, and Astrea are all friends, Diana and Astrea spend more time

together in the play and seem to share a special bond. The connection between the two appears stronger in contrast to the less emotional friendship they enjoy with Phillis. Indeed, Willan expresses their closeness in a brief, although physically demonstrative, exchange. Astrea thinks an angry Lycidas blames her for the death of his brother Celadon when he storms off at one point in the text. The resulting dialogue between Diana and Astrea blends real and perceived jealousies that issue from both heterosexual and homoerotic affections. Diana believes that Lycidas is not angry but jealous of her relationship with Astrea, which Diana identifies as "Our purer Fire bent to each others sex" (sig. D4). After this declaration, which denies sexual attraction by calling the love "pure," Diana kisses her friend. Perhaps in response to the kiss, Astrea asserts that she "feel[s] those Flames" that Diana would "so disavow" and rejects Diana's rationalizations about female-female erotic purity (sig. D4). The "Flames" also denote a passionate jealousy because Diana holds a token meant for someone other than Astrea. In response, Diana reassures Astrea that she is "wholly Thine" and embraces her (sig. D4).²⁵ Even the potential comic irony of the scene—both Diana and Astrea might be attempting to lighten the mood and Astrea's own disposition by feigning a jealous pique—does not dampen its argument that female-female love sparks erotic passion.

Astrea compares homoerotic attachments with heterosexual unions in several narrative strands and continually finds the former comparably affecting, sustaining, and fulfilling. Relationships between women are not more sensually pure than those between women and men; they produce erotic feelings and jealousy. According to Willan's play, homoerotic relationships sustain women and are as necessary as heterosexual commitments. Rather than a form of love that gives way to heterosexual relationships, one that relinquishes all affectional and erotic energies when a woman unites with a male partner, Willan presents homoerotic alliances between women as a superior romantic attachment that eventually incorporates heterosexuality.

II FLETCHER'S *THE LOYAL SUBJECT* AND *THE PILGRIM*

After Shakespeare, the most popular playwright to construct scenarios of female homoeroticism within the drama was John Fletcher. Two of his plays, written a few years apart for the King's Company, include strikingly different representations of female-female desire. *The Pilgrim* (1621) is a rollicking comedy, while the earlier *The Loyal Subject* (1618)

is a tragicomedy on the theme of loyalty to both love and duty that includes commentary on the disposition of monarchy. *The Loyal Subject* is notable for its use of a cross-dressed male character to produce the homoerotic tensions in the work.²⁶ Like *Philaster* and a number of other plays, the text conceals the cross-dressed character's disguise from the audience until late in the action, and, like those other plays, it also offers subtle indications of the true sex of the character early in the action.²⁷ In this construct, female homoeroticism exists in the surface imagery of the play—in the dialogue and visual images presented on stage.

The romantic plot focuses on Olimpia, sister to the Duke of Moscovia, and her "pretty" new waiting-woman, the young Archas disguised as Alinda (sig. Ccc4).²⁸ Olimpia finds Alinda "handsome" (sig. Ccc5), and is instantly attracted to her. When Olimpia's brother the Duke meets Alinda, he too finds her attractive, which sets up a male homosexual construct in the text as well and establishes a comic irony. Alinda assures the jealous Olimpia that she could never love the Duke or any man and wants only to serve her. When Alinda subsequently refuses to desert Olimpia during the threat of the advancing Tartars, Olimpia expresses her admiration, which crosses into sexual passion: "O my Jewell, / How much I am bound to love thee: by this hand wench / If thou wert a man" (sig. Ddd2). The distinction of a desiring subject attracted to a male-to-female disguised character is that the dialogue becomes explicit in its homoerotic content. Olimpia's desire has exceeded any threshold of care or friendly affection that aristocratic women might express for their companions. The abortive declaration about what she would do if Alinda were a man exposes the sexual desire she feels for someone she, and the audience, thinks is female. Later, when jealousy overcomes Olimpia because she believes that Alinda has betrayed her love by sleeping with the Duke, she dismisses Alinda from court in an emotionally wrought, passionate exchange.

Olimpia: Go, go Alinda, do not mock me more.

I have found thy heart wench, doe not wrong thy Mistris,
Thy too much loving Mistris

Alinda: The businesse of my life is now to pray for ye,
Pray for your vertuous loves; Pray for your children,
When heaven shall make ye happy.

Olimpia: How she wounds me?

Either I am undone, or she must go: . . .

. . . look on me,

I love those eyes yet dearely; I have kiss'd thee,

And now Ile doe't againe: farewell Alinda,

I am too full to speak more, and too wretched. (sig. Eee4v)

When Olimpia finally meets the young Archas, who pretends he is Alinda's brother, she is overcome with lust at "Alinda, in that shape" (sig. Fff4). She eagerly agrees to marry Archas when she discovers that he was Alinda all along. By setting a male character in female disguise, and keeping that information from the audience, Fletcher constructs a desiring female subject who must confront her homoerotic passions for an ostensibly female figure. Like the myth of Iphis and Ianthe, the narrative concludes with a miraculous sex change that rewards Olimpia and allows her to fulfill her desires. And yet, the end result does not negate the scenes of intense homoerotic attraction that comprise the core of their relationship and which seem to be Fletcher's main interest.

Fletcher's second play to deal with female homoerotic constructs is the comedy *The Pilgrim*, based on Lope de Vega's *El Peregrino en su Patria*. After the King's Men presented the work at court on New Year's Day in 1622, it became a part of their standard repertoire. The drama remained fashionable in the Restoration theatre and both Sir John Vanburgh and John Philip Kemble revised it, the former in 1700 and the latter in 1787.²⁹ Although the play relies on multiple disguising of both male and female characters, female homoeroticism exists separate from the various masquerades—disguise does not excite female homoerotic desire in this play. Nevertheless, Fletcher restrains the desire by constructing it as unrequited love between mistress and maid. The plot presents an elaborate chase sequence in which numerous characters follow the heroine Alinda after she disappears to avoid a forced marriage. Unbeknownst to her, Alinda's maid, the adoring Juletta, aids her in avoiding her captors and takes vicious delight obstructing any attempts by Alinda's father to find his daughter.

Juletta is a marvelously witty servant in the Roman tradition whose love motivates her to help Alinda, and that emotion propels her energetically and passionately through the action of the play. Her character traits emerge immediately as she talks with Alinda about men in the opening scene, advising her young, devout mistress that a lusty night is all Alinda needs to end her melancholy. Although she encourages Alinda to marry, Juletta conceives of men as anonymous sexual partners, interchangeable and readily available. She demonstrates no true affection for men or interest in heterosexual romance. Instead, the character displays an emotional regard and tenderness toward Alinda. For example, after being thrown out of the house for her impertinence when Alinda runs away, Juletta frankly tells her master Alphonso that she is pleased to go "For if your house were gold, and she [Alinda] not in it, / Sir, I should count it but a cage to whistle in" (sig. Ggggglv).³⁰

She treasures Alinda's presence more than wealth. Juletta might be a lusty comic maid, but Fletcher ennobles the sentiments she expresses regarding Alinda and develops her affection with romantic pathos. While men are indiscriminate playthings to Juletta, Alinda is the focus of her lasting affection.

During the ensuing action, Juletta undertakes several different disguises to protect Alinda from her angry father, planning to make him "curse the houre" he "vext a woman" (sig. Hhhhh4v). Her most malicious, and amusing, prank is getting Alphonso thrown in a mad-house by telling the warden he has gone insane over his love for a young boy. Juletta works incessantly to protect Alinda—her "blessing" (sig. Hhhhh2v). However, the suspicious Alinda, who worries that her servant is in league with her father, does not reciprocate the affection Juletta feels and hides even from the woman who so desperately wants to help her. When the two women finally meet late in the play, Juletta petulantly questions: "Why are you still so fearfull of me, Lady? / So doubtfull of my faith, and honest service? / To hide your selfe from me, to fly my company? / Am I not yours? all yours . . . ? / . . . Is not my life tyde to ye" (sig. Iiiii1). The final lines of the play erase any doubts as to Juletta's affectional preference when Alphonso offers her in marriage to the assembled men. Before any man accepts the proposal, Juletta interrupts and proclaims, "No I beseech you Sir; / My Mistresse is my husband, with her I'll dwell still" (sig. Iiiii3).

This is a curious moment, for Juletta had eagerly anticipated her own wedding night in the opening scene, but rejects marriage here in order to stay with Alinda. Further, she equates her relationship with her mistress with heterosexual unions. Alinda is her "husband," and she will be the dutiful wife. The comment not only underscores the loyalty and affection Juletta has displayed throughout the action but also includes a sexual innuendo as well. Juletta is more than a devoted servant: she is a spouse—and she abandons the heterosexual gratification she spoke of so fondly in the early scenes of the play to remain with Alinda. The implication is that her life with Alinda provides all the sexual pleasure and satisfaction she requires. Like Willan, Fletcher does not erase homoeroticism in favor of heterosexuality; he aligns the two as best he can within a patriarchal structure.

III JOHN LYLY'S *GALLATHEA*

The most striking example of female homoeroticism to emerge in dramatic literature before the end of the sixteenth century is found in

John Lyly's romantic comedy *Gallathea*, written for the boys' company of St. Paul's sometime before 1585. Adapted, in part, from the story of Iphis and Ianthe in Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, the play takes a theoretical look at the nature of love and explores its transformative power.³¹ A subplot debates the romantic theme by contesting chastity and pleasure, allegorized through the mythological characters of Diana, Venus, and Cupid.³² The main plot revolves around two cross-dressed female characters, Gallathea and Phyllida, and unlike much early modern literature that employs disguise and exploits same-sex attraction as a comedic device, the text presents a mutual attraction between the two women that they affirm even after revealing their identities. Gallathea and Phyllida are beautiful young virgins who dress as boys, as dramatic convention so often dictated, to save their lives, and their respective fathers send them to a nearby forest. They meet, are immediately attracted to one another, exchange provocative dialogue that desperately hints at the biological reality existing under their masculine attire, and quickly suspect the female sex of the other.³³

The problem of male disguise raises the possibility that the characters believe each other to be men, which would lessen a homoerotic reading. However, the male disguise is such a thinly veiled deception that upon their second meeting in the forest both Gallathea and Phyllida believe the other is a woman: "I feare me he is as I am, a mayden" (sig. D4v).³⁴ Gender coding through dress becomes a poor performative substitute for gendered behavior and attributes. Though Phyllida finds Gallathea's voice masculine, and Gallathea thinks Phyllida should have blushed at their exchange if she were a woman, both read past the sartorial imaging to the dialogic and gestural performances that mark their sex. In *Gallathea* both the title character and Phyllida perform gender badly, which allows them to view each other's biological sex over gendered clothing and allows the audience to see same-sex attraction unencumbered by heterosexual posturing. The male disguise does not preclude a homoerotic reading since the text so sharply undermines the possibility of heterosexual intrigue.

The question of male apparel is significant on another level since cross-dressed women who were sexually active with other women were more prone to legal prosecution for their behavior than were non-transvestite women. If Gallathea or Phyllida had been comfortable dressed as men, audiences might have perceived them as sexually transgressive or aberrant. Accordingly, both display their dislike for male clothing, Gallathea remarking that the disguise is "hatefull" (sig. B2v), and Phyllida telling her father that man's apparel "wil neither

become my bodie, nor my minde" (sig. B3v). In this way, the text foregrounds the feminine decorum of both women. Lyly did not want his audience to view these cross-dressed female characters as masculine or aggressive, which might have rendered them unsympathetic.

The homoerotic attraction between Gallathea and Phyllida begins early as the text reveals they are not drawn to stereotypically masculine attributes, but to feminine qualities in each other. Phyllida declares, "It is pittie that Nature framed you not a woman, having a face so faire, so lovely a countenaunce, so modest a behaviour" (sig. D4). Gallathea, equally drawn to Phyllida's femininity, questions, "Why did Nature to him a boy give a face so faire" (sig. D1v). A "faire" and "lovely . . . countenaunce" attracts each woman who both find the same feminine traits desirable as if drawn by the "resemblance in Sexe" that Phillis claimed made attachments between women superior to heterosexual unions. Laurie Shannon discusses the similarities that attract the two characters.³⁵ Shannon posits a theory of homonormativity as the force that brings them together. She compares female homoeroticism with the early modern discourse on male friendship and argues that female friendships accrue erotic connotations from "Renaissance homonormativity," a preference based on similarity and resemblance.³⁶ If the gender attributes that occupy Gallathea and Phyllida had been more traditionally masculine, the play would allow a heterosexual reading—each character assuming the other is male—but by demonstrating a mutual appeal for the feminine qualities they share, the text firmly establishes the homoerotic nature of their desire.³⁷ Each woman is attracted to female attributes—to the woman beneath the disguise—rather than to male characteristics the disguise might represent.

The erotic tension that draws the women together continues to build in act 4 when Phyllida asks Gallathea if she may call Gallathea "Mistris."³⁸ They begin a game much like the one between Orlando and the disguised Rosalind in *As You Like It*. Curiously, Phyllida does not wish to be called mistress, but asks permission to call the disguised Gallathea mistress. Up to this point Phyllida has claimed that she does not want Gallathea to be a woman—so why does she ask to call Gallathea "Mistris" here? If Phyllida actually believes, or wants to believe, that Gallathea is a man, why attempt to disrupt her disguised masculinity? Lyly replaces Gallathea's disguise with a disguised reality—what Victor Freeburg would call a retro-disguise—and foregrounds the homoerotic attraction of the two characters.³⁹ Perhaps the most probative moment of the women's homoerotic desire, however, occurs just after Gallathea agrees to the game. Believing that Phyllida is a woman, Gallathea nevertheless professes that she fears "Nothing

but that you love me not" (sig. F3) and exits the stage. Alone, a troubled Phyllida questions her desire for another woman: "Poore Phillida, what shouldest thou thinke of thy selfe, that lovest one that I feare mee, is as thy selfe is" (sig. F3). The character, though she has no vocabulary to identify her feelings, appears surprisingly distressed regarding a desire that scholars claim was of little concern in the sixteenth century. Her doubt and dismay belie more than worry over the possibility of sexual gratification, they suggest a fear of social disgrace. The character would have no reason in Elizabethan culture to feel pensive about a moderate fondness. Phyllida's passion is sexual, and Lyly meant to inscribe it as such.⁴⁰

At the play's conclusion, when they reveal their sexual identities, Gallathea and Phyllida remain steadfast in their love, despite objections by both Neptune and Diana. In other dramas of this period, when the male disguise of a female character becomes superfluous, a suitable male partner is found for her, whether she has shown interest in one or not. However, although Gallathea calls herself "unfortunate" and Phyllida believes herself "accursed," they do not look for male partners, but instead declare:

Gallathea: I will never love any but Phyllida. Her love is engraven in my heart with her eyes.

Phyllida: Nor I any but Gallathea, whose faith is imprinted in my thoughts by her words. (sig. G4v)

This affirmation outside the convention of male disguise is unique in early modern drama. Cupid had foreshadowed the vow in the subplot when he explained that: "Love knots are tyde with eyes, and cannot be undoone with hands, made fast with thoughts, and cannot be unlosed with fingers" (sig. F1–F1v). Gallathea and Phyllida echo Cupid's remarks in their declarations quoted above, and Cupid, who controls only base, physical passion, which is transitory, becomes a foil to substantiate the inviolable nature of their union. At the same time, however, Neptune invokes heteropatriarchal authority by calling the women's love an "idle choyce" and says it is "strange, and foolish, for one Virgine to doate on another" (sig. G4v). But Lyly ends the dialectic by supporting homoerotic desire, for Neptune's line is shortly followed by a kind of spousal agreement, a vow to Venus that the women's love for each other is "unspotted, begunne with trueth, continued wyth constancie, and not to bee altered tyll death" (sig. G4v).⁴¹ Within his polemic about the nature of love, whether consciously or not, Lyly argued for the validity of non-normative

homoerotic relations between women rather than the supremacy of dominant cultural sexual conventions.

In order to devise an acceptable conventional ending in the play, Lyly has Venus promise to change one of the women into a man so that they might marry and "enjoy" each other (sig. H1). However, neither character is revealed after the metamorphosis, nor is either woman marked for the transformation. Lyly does not dramatize the sex change, which suggests its insignificance. Scholarly assessments of this suggestive conclusion fall along a kind of political continuum. For example, both Joel B. Altman and Susan C. Kemper assert that Gallathea must be the character transformed into a man. They apply a conservative reading that normalizes Gallathea and Phyllida into a heterosexual couple. Several other scholars adopt a moderate position by focusing not on the sex change but on the homoerotic energy between the characters. Ellen M. Caldwell, Joseph W. Houppert, and Phyllis Rackin all agree that the audience has no investment in the change, while R. S. White has written that the emotional progress of the lovers takes precedence over any physical metamorphosis. Jacqueline Vanhoutte argues that the sex change allows the play to end androgynously through the ultimate union of the masculine and feminine and that it served as an allegory for Queen Elizabeth. The most radical reading of the play comes from Theodora Jankowski who finds that the arbitrary nature of the proposed sex change "trivializes the whole notion of" marriage and she argues that Gallathea and Phyllida fit her theory of "queer virgins."⁴² In fact, the entire play eschews heterosexual unions. Indeed, throughout the play male characters remain marginal to the erotic attractions and attractiveness of female characters for each other.⁴³ Not only does the main plot center on same-sex love, but so does the subplot in which Diana's nymphs become attracted to the disguised women. In fact, all the participants in the play's love intrigues are women, which creates a fully homoerotic spectacle.⁴⁴ Lyly does not simply align homoeroticism with heterosexuality, as Willan did in *Astrea* and Fletcher in *The Loyal Subject*, he erases heterosexuality all together in favor of homoerotic possibilities.

IV LODOWICK CARLELL'S *THE DESERVING FAVORITE* AND *THE PASSIONATE LOVERS*

Two plays by the cavalier playwright Lodowick Carlell also demonstrate that early modern drama identified female homoeroticism as a constituent form of romantic love and equated it with heterosexually

constructed desires. Both Carlell's *The Deserving Favorite* and *The Passionate Lovers* include unique constructions of female homoeroticism. These two plays exploit various female pairings to tease out several different homoerotic scenarios: misguided attraction prompted by male disguise, pretended seduction to expose a female page, the love of a companion for her mistress. However, Carlell also constructs wholly original scenarios of female homoeroticism in which a mature female character confesses passionate feelings for another woman. Carlell's plays identify these desires as analogous to heterosexual love, and on one occasion do so in a direct and didactic argument that compares homoeroticism with heteroeroticism. The multiplicity of female homoerotic constructions in each play is itself unique, but the unambiguous defense of female same-sex desire in *The Passionate Lovers* is singular. In the romantic landscapes Carlell creates, female homoeroticism (co)exists with and complements heterosexual love. Carlell elevates female homoerotic desire from the subtext of the narrative and presents it more explicitly than any other early modern English playwright.

Carlell (1602–75) was a popular courtier playwright during the reign of Charles I. The Stuart accession swept Carlell's Scottish border family into the new court circle, which eventually brought him to London. Carlell seems to have gone to court in his late teens, served Charles primarily as a huntsman, and obtained the position of Keeper of the Royal Deer Park at Richmond.⁴⁵ In a prologue he describes what must have been a very comfortable life: "Most here knows / This author hunts, and hawks, and feeds his Deer, / Not some, but most fair days throughout the year."⁴⁶ Carlell was also listed as a member of both the king and queen's privy chamber. He was a great favorite of Queen Henrietta Maria, who even traveled to the Blackfriars theatre to see one of his plays.⁴⁷ Although no evidence of his formal education exists, Carlell's plays, along with his translation of Pierre Corneille's *Heraclius*, suggest that he enjoyed advanced literary training. In all, he wrote eight scripts that the court greatly admired and that transferred to the Blackfriars and the repertoire of the King's Men. In fact, Carlell was one of the most often performed court playwrights.⁴⁸ Inigo Jones designed lavish costumes and sets for one of those occasions, a production of *The Passionate Lovers*.⁴⁹

The explicit representations of female homoerotic desire in Carlell's plays emerged from the complex system of platonic love made popular at court by Henrietta Maria after 1625. Alfred Harbage, in his discussion of *Cavalier Drama*, explains that the vogue of *préciosité* influenced Caroline playwrights to focus their attention

on female characters and direct their plots specifically to the interests of court women.⁵⁰ Erica Veevers, in her exhaustive analysis of the queen's influence on court entertainment, describes one version of platonic love and *préciosité* as the passionless relationship between an attractive, jocose woman and her bevy of devotees. Veevers is careful; however, to distinguish between *préciosité* and the specific *honnête amitié* that Henrietta Maria imported with her from France. According to Veevers, the queen expected women to display idealized feminine qualities while they actively engaged in the social pursuits of courtship and marriage.⁵¹ Mutual respect governed relationships, and while sexual attraction had its place, the new tenet discouraged passionate love and lust. Veevers notes Henrietta Maria's influence specifically on plays by Carlell.⁵² While the queen encouraged *honnête amitié*, England was familiar with *préciosité* through the powerful circle of Lucy Hay, Countess of Carlisle and both forms of platonic love influenced English playwrights.⁵³

As Harriette Andreadis argues, with its reverence for chastity, the exaggerated discourse of platonic love—heightened emotional sentiment, and erotic language—created a space in which to represent female same-sex affection. Andreadis focuses on writing by women as opposed to male-authored texts. She demonstrates that Katherine Philips (1631–64) used the platonic tradition with other literary conventions (Philips transferred the language, concepts, and passion of heterosexual platonic love to her poetic writing on female friendship) and constructed a female homoerotic discourse acceptable to seventeenth-century society.⁵⁴ That kind of erotic coding was necessary, Andreadis argues, because men comprehended, and increasingly feared, sexual behaviors between women. Texts written by men, such as editions of classical writing, medical anatomies, and travel narratives, presented female same-sex desire and behavior as transgressive.⁵⁵ According to Andreadis, Philips wrote as the discourse on female homoeroticism shifted—with the approach of the eighteenth century, discussions of female–female sexual behaviors and desires that had been openly articulated became marked in respectable society by silence and the kind of evasion Philips practiced, or by transgression and prurience elsewhere.

Carlell used the platonic tradition, as Katherine Philips would a decade later, to represent female homoerotic desire in a sympathetic context.⁵⁶ Like Philips in her poems, Carlell adopted the rhetorical strategies of heterosexual romantic discourse in various scenes featuring two female characters, but that discourse was far from chaste. Platonic love in plays of the 1630s supported a sexual tension that

contradicted its ostensibly virginal qualities. For example, William Davenant's *Platonic Lovers* contrasts two couples, one that exemplifies the platonic ideals of *honnête amitié* and the other that illustrates traditional passion.⁵⁷ Early in the play, the passionate couple remains chaste although they acknowledge their sexual desire. The platonic couple, however, enjoys sensually intimate late night visits that they excuse as sexually detached experiences. When Theander, the platonic male lover, realizes a starkly sexual drive inflames his passion, he exposes the hypocrisy of platonic ardor. Although platonic love was represented as an emotion free from sexual interest, Davenant's work reveals that its purity remained a hair's breadth away from physical lust and sexual desire.

Characteristics of platonic love, such as excessive admiration and expressions of sensual emotion, when used to ennoble same-sex friendships, construct homoerotic tensions in dramatic literature. In the same way that platonic heterosexual unions are only marginally distinct from passionate ones and may easily transform into sexual relationships, homoerotic pairings supported by platonic ideals, although technically chaste, emit an obvious sexual energy. Based as they are on platonic notions, Carlell's plays move beyond instances of female friendship and homosociality. Women in Carlell's plays actively support one another, praise each other's beauty in sensual terms, and cherish female relationships on a par with heterosexual romances. Both *The Deserving Favorite* and *The Passionate Lovers* present female homoerotic scenarios that reflect the influence of platonic love in vogue at the English court.

The Deserving Favorite, one of Carlell's earliest works, is critically considered his best drama.⁵⁸ Presented to Charles in 1629 and then brought to the public stage by the King's Men (supposedly without Carlell's knowledge), it saw publication in the same year.⁵⁹ Characters in this complex tragicomic plot struggle with the contrasting demands of love and honor. Two men, the Duke and Lysander, pursue Clarinda in a typical heterosexual love triangle that the Princess Cleonarda complicates when she also falls in love with Lysander. After duels, disguisings, noble sacrifices, Lysander's near execution, and the revelation that Clarinda and Lysander are siblings, the play ends happily. Several homoerotic pairings also shadow the complicated heterosexual romance in the play.⁶⁰ The intimate relations suggested between Cleonarda and her woman Mariana, as well as the erotic dialogue between Cleonarda and Clarinda, present female homoeroticism as one variation of romantic love within the shifting and multiple relationships that characterize Carlell's play.⁶¹

Although her appearance is delayed until midway through act 2, Cleonarda is introduced early in the text by the Duke, who describes her to Lysander and Clarinda as a vibrantly masculine figure: "She is a Lady of that noble Spirit, / That she wants nothing but the person of a Man / To be one, her heart being equall / To the most valiant" (sig. D4–D4v).⁶² To illustrate her admirable character, the Duke recounts a harrowing incident when Cleonarda killed a wolf. However, the story has the effect of painting Cleonarda in tones of ambiguous gender—athletic, daring, violently ruthless—in short, as the Duke has already declared—manly. Cleonarda also lives, as the Duke implies, suspiciously far from court in a forest lodge where she enjoys a companionable solitude with her waiting-woman, Mariana. A twenty-first-century reader would find Cleonarda sexually provocative from these expository accounts of her nontraditional, unfeminine behavior. She seems the epitome of what Terry Castle defined as the "apparitional lesbian"—a figure existing in metaphor and allegory, a character "sensed" by her unconventional behavior "but never *seen*."⁶³ Her martial and independent conduct is uncharacteristic for a princess; she could therefore be sexually anomalous as well, one of Jankowski's "queer virgins."⁶⁴ Cleonarda troubles heterosexuality first by living in female seclusion and ultimately by choosing her own husband over the vehement objections of her brother—a brother who, as monarch, represents the locus of patriarchal authority.

Cleonarda's first appearance supports a transgressive reading as she rests with Mariana after the day's hunt and discusses the evils of enforced marriage. An obvious intimacy exists between the two women, who decide to go bathing. Their affection, however, is tested when they rescue Mariana's wounded brother Lysander, who believes he has just killed the Duke. Cleonarda's decision to save Lysander demonstrates her affectional preference for Mariana, which supercedes the familial bonds she shares with her brother:

Cleonarda: What shall I doe, if I helpe to preserve him
 That kild my Kinsman, it is unnaturall in me,
 And I besides may lose my Brothers good opinion;
 And should I be the cause that Mariana's brother perish,
 I shall lose her for euer; either shee'l dye for grieve,
 Or else shee'l hate me. (sig. F4)

However, Cleonarda and Lysander soon fall in love, arousing Mariana's jealousy. Although she previously had displayed only the greatest regard for him, Mariana ends up wishing her brother had

never been born: she calls him “unworthy” of Cleonarda’s love and condemns his “slender merits” (sig. H1v). She resents the disruption to her intimacy with Cleonarda and fears he will replace her in the affections of the princess. The text constructs Mariana’s behavior as a defensive reaction to the threat her brother poses.

During the course of the play, various love interests shift as relationships dissolve and others form. The relationship between Mariana and Cleonarda is just one of several affectional bonds repositioned during the action. The heterosexual love between Lysander and Cleonarda displaces this original homoerotic pairing. However, homoerotic attachments also supplant various heterosexual couplings. The text normalizes disruptions to both homoerotic and heteroerotic relationships as a part of romantic evolution. The play equates homoerotic and heterosexual desire and easily shifts characters between various sexual constructions. Cleonarda might retreat from her relationship with Mariana when she meets Lysander, but she also curbs her interest in him when she sees Clarinda.

At the end of act 3, Cleonarda finally meets Lysander’s original love, Clarinda, when they both arrive at court to beg a pardon for him. Left alone, however, they forget Lysander. An appreciation for the other woman’s physical beauty sends both characters into reverent ecstasies equal to the passions expressed by heterosexual couples in the play. Cleonarda is the “fairest Creature” that Clarinda has ever seen. Clarinda possesses an “excesse of beauty” that Cleonarda takes “delight to looke on.” They stand transfixed with emotion, and Clarinda confesses:

Clarinda: . . . Madame, may I perish,
 If ere mine eyes yet met an object, wherein
 I tooke halfe that delight that I doe now
 In looking upon you; were I a man,
 And could frame to my selfe a Mistris by my wishes
 Having the wide world to choose in, for each
 Particular to make up the whole. I should beleeve
 It were a fruitlesse labour, if I went farther
 Then your selfe thus fram’d. (sig. H4)

When Clarinda swears that Cleonarda delights her more than any other human being, her statement implicates both Lysander and the Duke. Clarinda not only professes to find Cleonarda more physically appealing than the men she loves, but also seems to recognize the sexual potential in that attraction—were she a man she would take

a mistress just like Cleonarda. The sensual atmosphere intensifies when Cleonarda apologizes that Lysander now loves her: "Stay sweet Clarinda, / And for as many teares as I have made thee shed / From those faire eyes, so oft Ile kisse the Crystall / Fountaines from whence they flowed; believe me, / Dearest maide, though I doe love Lysander, / Yet I would not wrong thee for a world" (sig. 11v). This short speech, infused with romantic rhetoric describing physical intimacy, heightens the erotic potential of the scene as Cleonarda offers to kiss Clarinda. Their mutual attraction, the sentiment of the scene's opening lines, and the mounting tension of their dialogue culminate in this physical gesture.

Cleonarda's remarks also point out a theme running throughout the play, one that applies both to heterosexual and homoerotic relationships. Each of the main characters, and Mariana, finds her/his love challenged by an opposing attraction. Several relationships shift as loves are altered in form, although none are extinguished—for example, Lysander begins the play romantically in love with Clarinda, but ends it as her loving sibling.⁶⁵ In the scene between Cleonarda and Clarinda, the platonic code of honor demands that Cleonarda forfeit her heterosexual love, which she happily agrees to do, ostensibly giving Lysander to her new friend Clarinda. In essence, she is also subverting her heterosexual affection to a newly found homoerotic attraction. This shift replaces her heterosexual union with Lysander, which had itself replaced her homoerotic relationship with Mariana. The erotic triangle of Cleonarda, Clarinda, and Lysander replicates Castle's "counterplot of lesbian fiction" as it sets up a female-male-female paradigm.⁶⁶ Carlell's easy movement between heterosexual and homosexual unions conveys their correspondence: homoeroticism and heterosexuality are constituent forms of romantic love.

Carlell continues to play upon the homoerotic connection between the heroines in Lysander's farewell address before his threatened execution:

Lysander: Weepe not Clarinda, you may live happily
 You and the Princesse may together make
 A kinde of Marriage, each one strongly
 Flattering themselves, the other is Lysander. (sig. L4)

What are the spectators to make of this speech? Are they to assume that each woman will take on the social, economic, affectionate, and even sexual role of a male lover for her female partner? Lysander certainly seems to imagine a future in which Cleonarda and Clarinda will

not only live together companionably, as Cleonarda and Mariana have done, but will also embrace each other as lovers. Because of the Duke's description, the audience already knows of Cleonarda's masculine proclivities, so imagining her in a male role would not be incongruous. Carlell seems to tease the audience with a provocatively homosexual solution to the dilemma posed by Lysander's death.

In her analysis of the play, Veevers identifies the supportive bond of friendship between Cleonarda and Clarinda, but sees no erotic charge in their relationship and maintains that they share a chaste affection.⁶⁷ Veevers excludes the erotic as a component in female friendships. However, eroticism existed in early modern constructs of both male and female friendship. Andreadis has shown that women in the mid-seventeenth century appropriated the eroticized discourse of male friendship in their writing to other women and she links that appropriation to expressions of female homoeroticism. That is, the rhetoric of male friendship imagined a heightened emotional atmosphere—in which friends joined souls, shared all joys and sorrows, cherished each other, and delighted in serving one another—and by doing so, constructed an erotic bond between male friends. According to Andreadis, the discourse described acceptable relationships between men, and women employed a similar rhetorical construct to identify erotic but respectable associations between women.⁶⁸ Carlell also seems to have used the technique and applied the male friendship model to create a homoerotic tension in the relationship between Cleonarda and Clarinda.

Part 2 of Carlell's play *The Passionate Lovers* also depicts female homoeroticism as a constituent form of romantic love. This play goes beyond *The Deserving Favorite* by presenting an impassioned argument in support of same-sex love. The narrative includes a disguised heroine, and Carlell provides a stunning innovation to the old conventional construct when his desiring subject professes her love long after the disguise is retired.⁶⁹ The cover page of the 1655 edition says it was "twice presented before the King and Queens Majesties at *Somerset-House*, and very often at the Private House in *Black-Friars*, with great Applause."⁷⁰ Although *The Passionate Lovers* was a popular court play, the text subsequently fell into obscurity.⁷¹ Harbage identifies the play as a tragicomedy and the contrast between love and honor is again the pivotal theme of this long romance, just as it had been in *The Deserving Favorite*.⁷² Two royal brothers, Agenor and Clarimant, compete for the affection of Clorinda, who dons male disguise to follow the disconsolate Agenor, only to learn that he has entered a companionate marriage with Austella, the princess of Neustrea.

The similarities between platonic and passionate love make it difficult for the four to sort out their true feelings for one another. Clorinda's cross-dressing, and the fact that Austella's younger sister, Olinda, falls in love with the disguised heroine further complicates the action. Even revealing her female identity brings no relief, for Olinda remains enamored of Clorinda after becoming aware of her sex and all the characters struggle with their desires.

The disguised Clorinda, the new stranger at the Neustrean court, captivates Olinda and Austella confirms the attraction when she tells Clorinda: "I find my sister loves you" (sig. H4v).⁷³ However, Austella, suspicious of the page because of Agenor's fondness, attempts to uncover Clorinda's identity by professing her own love for the disguised page. The scene quickly becomes a conventional cross-dressed seduction, not unlike that in *Twelfth Night*, *The Lover's Melancholy*, and *The Doubtful Heir*, but it also echoes Carlell's earlier play. Disturbed by the confrontation, unable to cope with the complications caused by her transvestism, and aggrieved for Agenor by Austella's apparent duplicity, Clorinda starts to cry. The consolation that Austella offers resembles the overture Cleonarda makes to Clarinda in *The Deserving Favorite*. As Agenor hides himself to overhear their conversation, Austella asks:

Austella: Why do you turn away? What, weep! Is my love
Such an injury? Or if some word have past my lips,
That mov'd this passion, my lips shall satisfie
By taking off these tears.

Agenor: [aside] I can endure no more:

Just heavens, how my inconstancie is punish't! Exit

Austella: Clear up those Suns, and let them gently shine upon me,
Or I am lost for ever! Not moved with all my Courtship,
Continue thus unkind, insensible of a Queens love,
And I shall think you are no man. (sig. H5–H5v)

It is worth noting that Agenor's aside interrupts Austella's two speeches, allowing Austella time to kiss Clorinda—her lips "taking off these tears." *The Deserving Favorite* suggests the same physical gesture, but the text does not support the action as explicitly as Carlell's construction does here. Austella then admonishes the still grieving Clorinda who obviously does not respond to the kiss.

Clorinda's disguise steadily unravels and she begins wearing female attire again. When Olinda first sees her dressed as a woman, well after Clorinda admits her identity, they have a remarkable exchange. In other sixteenth- and seventeenth-century plays, desiring subjects

eventually abandon their attraction for cross-dressed figures.⁷⁴ Olinda is a rarity. Rather than rejecting Clorinda, she finds her more attractive. At the beginning of a long, intimate dialogue, prominently positioned in act 3, she confesses:

Olinda: Dearest *Clorinda*! not less dear, because a woman;
 For such perfections in a man I solely could not
 Have posset my own defects barring that happiness:
 But as a woman sure, none can pretend
 With greater merit to your favour;
 All my wants supplied by my firm love,
 Which cannot know another object then your fair self. (sig. I6)

Olinda remains resolutely in love with Clorinda. Carlell rejects the standard response of desiring subjects in cross-dressed scenarios who replace sexual attraction for the disguised heroine with sisterly or friendly affection.⁷⁵ In fact, Olinda seems almost relieved to find herself in love with a woman and becomes articulate and bold, while she appeared shy and constrained in earlier scenes with “male” characters. Olinda argues that had Clorinda really been a man, she would not have been worthy of him, or her “defects” would not have allowed her to love a man. Certainly, the violent action of the Prince of Aquitaine, who loves her, has made Olinda wary of heterosexual attraction. Instead, she sees herself as a perfect lover for Clorinda and refuses to “know” anyone else. She argues confidently that her love deserves requital.

Olinda and Clorinda engage in a vigorous polemic over several pages; the latter gently but firmly advising Olinda to follow a heterosexual paradigm and turn her interests toward the recently arrived Clarimant, and the former maintaining that women should love one another the way she loves Clorinda:

Olinda: Dear *Clorinda*, I must not understand you,
 Or if I do, you have a mean opinion
 Of my Judgment, less of my Constancie,
 Which did but now profess my heart for ever only yours. (sig. I6v)

Carlell approaches the topic of female homoeroticism didactically, eschewing subtlety and innuendo. Olinda states distinctly and resolutely that she loves Clorinda. She even equates her love to male heterosexual passion and argues that it is indistinguishable from

Clarimant's, who also loves and desires Clorinda:

Olinda: But I beseech you do not entertain a thought
That you can breed a change in him or me.
Dear *Clorinda*, your vertue and your beauty
Is the object of our Loves; such a conformity
As may arise from that, betwixt Prince *Clarimant*
And me, is only fit. (sig. I6v)

In this remarkable speech, Olinda argues that homoeroticism is a form of romantic love analogous to heterosexuality. Olinda and Clarimant are romantic equals pursuing Clorinda. Carlell's rhetoric moves well beyond platonic friendship by asserting that a woman's love for another woman is equivalent to a man's love for a woman. While Olinda loses her bid for Clorinda, she does not abandon her conviction and remains unusually uncoupled at the end of the play, rather like Antonio in *Twelfth Night*.⁷⁶

Carlell's representation is all the more exceptional for abandoning the ambiguity and metaphor so prevalent in constructs of female homoeroticism. For example, both Jankowski and Jessica Tvordi have theorized homoerotic relations between "knowing" adult women in Shakespeare.⁷⁷ However, Jankowski explains that these relationships exist primarily "in the lesbian void"—those metaphoric spaces created in Shakespeare's plays that accommodate erotic encounters between women, but which rarely appear on stage, such as the cottage where Paulina sequesters Hermione for sixteen years in *The Winter's Tale*. Similarly, Tvordi examines the complex alliance of friendship between Rosalind and Celia in *As You Like It* and the alliance of service between Maria and Olivia in *Twelfth Night*. The plays that Jankowski and Tvordi consider relegate erotic potential to the offstage existence of various characters. Instead, Carlell prominently displays female homoerotic desire in a dialogue that is seen and heard rather than imagined. *The Passionate Lovers* represents the kind of erotic tensions only assumed by Jankowski and Tvordi between characters such as Portia and Nerissa, Paulina and Hermione, Rosalind and Celia, and Olivia and Maria. He elevates female homoerotic desire from a sub-textual position to a conscious discourse in the text. Clearly, playwrights other than Shakespeare used homoerotic constructs in their narratives, and often presented them in provocative and innovative scenarios.

The defining feature of these two plays is that, in them Carlell constructs female homoeroticism as a component of romantic love

commensurate with heterosexuality. His texts display more than a passive tolerance: they evince a serious dialectic supporting female homoerotic desire and female union. This is not to say, anachronistically, that Carlell was taking a sociopolitical stand to promote or defend an oppressed sexuality, but that his plays problematize the current critical dichotomy that men either ignored female homoerotic desire as an irrelevant affectional position—as insignificant adolescent or impossible longing—or condemned it, fearing the challenge to their sexual authority. *The Deserving Favorite* and *The Passionate Lovers* are tragicomedies heavily influenced by conventions of platonic love that emphasize exaggerated expressions of earnestly honorable emotions. They appeal neither as comic interjections nor as moral correctives to inappropriate, potentially disruptive behavior. Carlell's plays illustrate that male authors conceived of female homoerotic desire as an element of romantic love and created acceptable and approving narratives of female same-sex attraction. Carlell's texts demonstrate the need to continue exploring dramatic literature for representations of female homoeroticism as new discoveries expand our knowledge about constructions of female desire.

CONCLUSION

The plays in this study cover nearly one hundred years, from 1570, the earliest possible date of *Clyomon and Clamydes*, to 1662, the publication date of the plays Margaret Cavendish wrote during the Interregnum. However, they provide little evidence in the way of a chronological argument. They neither clearly support nor obviously refute the view that social constraints against female homoeroticism increased as the eighteenth century neared. Such an argument presumes that English culture approached depictions of female homoeroticism consistently within a given historical moment and that the acceptance or rejection of female homoeroticism depended on its appearance within a historical progression. The evidence from dramatic literature, however, does not endorse this kind of chronological argument. Rather, dramatic narratives of female homoeroticism varied widely throughout this nearly hundred-year period and suggest that constraint did not emerge as a historical consequence but that differing depictions of desire were always more or less acceptable. Playwrights always exercised careful control over depictions of female homoerotic desire within already established metaphors of love. In short, playwrights condemned lust but constructed laudatory scenarios of selfless, romantic love between women.

This dichotomy between love and lust, of course, appears regularly in the literature of early modern England. Maurice Charney argued that in Shakespeare the two were “polar opposites” and pointed to the “debilitating effects of lust” as recurrent themes in the sonnets, poems, and plays.¹ For example, Adonis chides Venus that her lust cannot compare with the virtues of true love in Shakespeare’s *Venus and Adonis*:

Love comforteth, like sunshine after rain,
But Lust’s effect is tempest after sun;
Love’s gentle spring doth always fresh remain,
Lust’s winter comes ere summer half be done;
Love surfeits not, Lust like a glutton dies;
Love is all truth, Lust full of forged lies. (799–804)

Lust, which Charney equates with villains, is excessive, abusive, deceptive, and transgressive; it consumes and reduces while love inspires and is fertile. In a Petrarchan ideal, love leads to a spiritual fulfillment that exceeds the gratification of sexual appetite. Plato and his Italian commentators, such as Marsilio Ficino, provided the theoretical source for this contrast between an earthly, bodily love or lust and a more transcendent, spiritual love.² In order to construct homoerotic desires between female characters worthy of praise rather than condemnation, playwrights tended toward idealized rather than physical expressions of love.

Drawing on texts from the earliest and latest limits of this study helps explain the difference between those behaviors playwrights constructed as culturally acceptable and those subjected to discipline and punishment. For example, Wilson's play *The Three Ladies of London* and Lyly's *Gallathea* are contemporary texts from the early 1580s; however, they represent contradictory views of female homoeroticism. Wilson labeled his play a comedy but few texts provide such a severe penalty for a female character erotically involved with another woman. In Wilson's play, a court of law condemns the villainous Lucar to suffer "torment without end, / Burning in the lake of fire and brimstone" (sig. F3). Her punishment leaves little doubt about her spiritual damnation. Of course, Lucar is a woman of many vices, but her callous seduction of the virtuous Conscience emphasizes the extent of her immorality. Charged with adultery, robbery, and murder, Lucar boldly denies her crimes in the absence of witnesses. Only Conscience, guilty about their "lascivious living" and embarrassed that Lucar "corrupted" her "by flatterie," testifies against their "naughty living," even though Lucar begs "if thou love me say nothing" (sig. F2v-F3). Lucar falls prey to her own lust as her most innocent and sexually vulnerable victim defeats her. In the end, none of Lucar's crimes seems to matter quite as much as her seduction of Conscience, on which Wilson concentrates the trial scene. Her other crimes, no matter how abhorrent, are ordinary in comparison with the sexual transgression of violating another woman.

In *Gallathea*, Lyly approached female homoeroticism quite differently than Wilson. He compared transient attractions with a solid, secure, permanent love and ridiculed the former while endorsing the latter as a sustaining emotional attachment. What becomes so important in Lyly's play is that a homoerotic relationship between female characters represents true love while Cupid, an icon of heterosexuality, is used to symbolize more ambiguous affections. In 4.2, Cupid explains to Diana's nymphs that relationships based on flattery,

money, dishonesty, or force will never last, although he finds them amusing, and implies that true love is rare. Cupid delights in both stable and inconstant unions; one offers enjoyable diversion while the other results in committed relationships. Gallathea and Phyllida exemplify this scarce perfect love, a love firmly established by thought and emotion rather than one originating from compliment, greed, lies, or the need to accommodate social position. Perhaps most importantly, Gallathea and Phyllida practice sexual restraint as they form an emotionally sustaining and deeply affecting bond. Not that their relationship is devoid of sexual attraction—the scenes between the women are based on sexual desire—but Gallathea and Phyllida control their erotic interest. Venus sanctions their relationship because of its emotional depth as well as its sexual potency—“never shall it be said that Nature or Fortune shall over throwe Love and Fayth” (sig. G4v). Unlike the indiscriminate, libidinous, capricious Lucar, Gallathea and Phyllida demonstrate a considerate, tender devotion.

This difference between love and lust exists in the later plays as well. The two texts of Leonard Willan from the 1650s depict homoerotic desires between women in starkly contrasting narratives. For example, lust for the disguised Fidelity carries away the title character of *Orgula*. Desire prompts Orgula to seduce the young woman she thinks is a page on the very night she marries the aged but powerful Sinevero. Orgula fails to maintain the dignity that her serving women argue is so necessary for women of beauty in order to exercise any authority in a patriarchal world. Instead, she places personal desires over obligation and duty and insincerely justifies her seduction as an appropriate course of action for someone sacrificing her youth and physical appeal to age and influence. However, her rationalization is merely a consequence of her consuming lust, which eventually leads to madness and death. The obvious condemnation of Orgula’s immoderate and aberrant homoerotically directed lust differs from the vehement admiration Willan expressed for female attachments in *Astrea*. In Willan’s pastoral, Phillis argues that similarity between women makes them better companions who may claim a stronger bond of true love than is possible between a man and a woman. For her courtly efforts, Diana judges Phillis the more “ami’able” partner in her competition with Sylvander (sig. F3). The text seems to confirm this argument by depicting loyal, supportive relationships between women, especially between Diana and Astrea—relationships that contain strong erotic impulses. Female attractions based on sympathy, faithful allegiance, and fidelity are productive and sustaining. Alternately, lust between women, even the unrequited lust of Orgula,

is not merely dangerous and threatening but violent and fatal. Throughout the century represented by the plays in this study, negative depictions of women who love or desire other women, like Orgula or Lucar, are offset by the positive images of female–female love offered in plays such as *Astrea* and Lyly's *Gallathea*.

This oppositional positioning of love and lust appears very clearly in a single play published late in the 1650s. *The Female Rebellion* compares the virtuous bond between Nicostrate and Orithya with the iniquitous coupling of the Amazon warriors Antiopa and Penthesilea. The author constructs and positions these two couples so that the relationship between the former—based on loyalty, trust, devotion, and affection—appears superior to the latter—mired in competition, envy, and lust. Antiopa and Penthesilea do not fail solely because they are homoerotically attracted to one another, although the text juxtaposes them with the more heterosexually oriented Nicostrate and Orithya. Rather, their excessive passion, their inability to control and balance their desire, both for each other and for power, leads to their collapse. In contrast, Nicostrate and Orithya govern their desires and behave with reverence and respect. In regard to this latter couple, the playwright of *The Female Rebellion*, like Lyly and Willan, constructed a relationship between female characters that was both erotically charged, even if it was sexually chaste, and socially acceptable, even admirable. The selfless devotion of Nicostrate during the Amazon rebellion and Orithya's self-sacrifice over the question of succession are exactly the types of behavior that render their relationship honorable. However, the author also takes every opportunity to suggest the sexual possibilities in their relationship. Romantic self-sacrifice is not without erotic energy or beyond the signification of sexual practice, but it avoids any connotations of licentiousness.

Selfless devotion, generosity, compassion, and liberal affection denote true love between female characters. Gallathea and Phyllida; Diana, Astrea, and Phillis; Nicostrate and Orithya symbolize these qualities. Other characters possess them as well. Carlell's Olinda feels drawn to Clorinda's virtue as well as her beauty and professes the constancy of her affection. His Clarinda and Cleonarda are surprisingly charitable to each other about their competing attachment over Lysander. Shakespeare's Celia runs away to an uncertain future in the forest with Rosalind rather than remaining in comfort at court; Titania keeps the "changeling boy" for the sake of her "vot'ress" despite Oberon's objections (2.1.120, 123); Emilia cherishes the pure, instinctual, natural passion she shared with Flavina. Even the tender compassion of a Callidor or Eroclea when confronted with

ardent desiring subjects suggests the benevolence of true love. Juletta, the adoring maid in Fletcher's *The Pilgrim* provides a prime example of this sincere, honest devotion. After losing her position, with little regard for herself, she protectively follows her mistress, Alinda, and frustrates any attempt to catch the runaway. Throughout her many adventures Juletta's one thought is to provide "comfort" to Alinda (sig. Ggggg4). Once she succeeds in uniting Alinda with Pedro and securing the forgiveness of Alphonso, Juletta refuses to marry so that she may remain with Alinda in domestic harmony. Romanticized, idealized, even sentimental constructions like these present an audience with estimable affections and virtuous relationships between female characters.

Admirable bonds between women even provide a comparative critique of heterosexuality. For example, the disastrous heterosexual unions that Cupid undoes contrasts with the deep affections that cement the relationship between Gallathea and Phyllida in Lyly's *Gallathea*. Shakespeare and Fletcher equate heterosexuality with aggression and violence in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* while seeming to agree with Willan's Phillis that similarity between the sexes make same-sex unions preferable. While not a union of true love, women bond together against male stupidity and immorality in Middleton's *Anything for a Quiet Life*. When Knaves-bee agrees to debauch his wife Sib for profit with the dissolute Beaufort, she joins with the once disguised Mrs. Cressingham to escape Beaufort and punish her husband. Homosociality and erotic consent—the women declare that they have lain together—rebuke marriage and sexual coercion. Even a late play like Brome's *A Madd Couple Well Matcht* provides a harsh social critique of heterosexual marriage and presents a strong, independent, and homoerotically nuanced character in Amie. Her erotic bonds with various women in the play and refusal to marry Lord Lovely at its conclusion suggest an alternative to the suspicion, adultery, sexual coercion, and greed that drive the heterosexual relationships in the text. Both male and female lusts become subject to the instructive and reformative potential in the construction of virtuous bonds between female characters.

Whereas true love becomes obvious owing to the manifestation of certain qualities in a character, such as fidelity, devotion, generosity, compassion, and genuine affection, lust often appears alongside traits such as treachery, neglect, avarice, envy, and hostility. Lucar cheats, steals, and murders; Orgula grasps after power and commits adultery; Antiopa and Penthesilea rebel against a just government and attempt regicide. Within these plays, female characters homoerotically attracted

to or aggressive with other women often exhibit lust in combination with other malevolent or scandalous traits, as if to make it abundantly clear that spectators should avoid the behaviors presented by these women. Predatory characters like Corsica, Forsaken, Heronia, or Roxolana act out of jealousy, and greed influences Celestina's career as a bawd. Voadas's avarice, adultery, and religious infidelity; Olivia's usurpation of Murcia and adulterous flirtation in Shirley's *The Doubtful Heir*; and Thamasta's arrogance all combine with their homoerotic lust. Even within comic scenarios female characters display certain kinds of unsociable behavior along with their homoerotic attractions that leave them open to ridicule and correction.³ In comedies, playwrights couple lust with qualities such as greed, arrogance, adulterous desires, crude simplicity, and insincerity. Just as the representation of virtuous female homoeroticism relied on a combination of admirable character traits, so too the construction of homoerotic lust required the association of contemptible characteristics.

Constructions of female homoeroticism in early modern English drama, then, appear to separate into two broader categories: the admissible and the disturbing. Representations of desire between women were acceptable within a romanticized construct, which rendered all the more transgressive those depictions that sexualized relations between female characters. In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, English playwrights experimented between these two extremes. However, as the constructs developed in drama and other literature, they seem to have become more distinct and singular. The notion of "romantic friendship" as opposed to the idea of homosexual vice began to appear before the eighteenth century, and by the nineteenth century romantic friendship between women existed on a separate social and cultural level from homosexuality.⁴ Society rendered romantic friendship acceptable because of its presumed asexuality, even if it was not, but viciously condemned sexualized relationships between women. This dichotomy, less obvious, less divisive, existed in early modern drama among the energetic, careful, provocative constructions of sometime playful, sometime anxious, sometime predatory, and sometime utopian scenarios of female homoeroticism. Unfortunately, these rich and varied constructions, with their competing signs and significations, disappeared after time into a polarized literary construct of simplified virtue and vice.

Playwrights in early modern England constructed female homoeroticism within familiar literary motifs and conventions accessible to their audience. A female character lusting after a cross-dressed heroine became an object of comic ridicule or transgressive reproach, depending

on the genre of the play. Her reclamation through heterosexual marriage and the disguised heroine's return to a feminine persona, or their eventual expulsion and death, became part of the reestablishment of social order necessary for a satisfying dramatic conclusion. Virtuous female relationships, sexually chaste but erotically sensual and suggestive, provided models of selfless affection in dramatic literature. However, these were not static images on the page. Except for the closet dramas in this study, companies of English actors played out the passions of these characters on stage. Desire was more than a rhetorical conceit; it enjoyed both verbal and visual expression. Spectators experienced passion between women not in the abstract but as a corporeal presence. They saw and heard the various ways in which female characters interacted with one another in playful, anxious, predatory, and utopian erotic scenarios. As a form of popular entertainment, these plays reached a wide audience and represent what the common, illiterate mass may have known and thought about women who loved other women. They demonstrate the kinds of cultural understanding regarding homoerotic desires between women in circulation in early modern England.

This study has described and classified the various constructions of female homoeroticism that appeared in the dramatic literature of early modern England, from playfully erotic scenarios, to anxious plot complications, predatory assaults, to utopian declarations of romantic love. Awareness of the phenomenon that some women loved and desired, even lusted after or engaged in sexual actions with, other women was widespread enough that the culture developed these various positions to female homoeroticism. Playwrights did not hesitate to appropriate these diverse cultural positions within their plays. They employed sophisticated dramaturgical strategies, such as the use of the cross-dressed heroine, in order to insert representations of female same-sex desire in their scripts and make them accessible to an audience. The evidence in this study reveals a rich cultural engagement with female homoerotic desire. In fact, the surprising number of plays in this study suggests that more work remains in the reidentification and interpretation of dramatic literature that includes representations of female homoeroticism. For example, how do dramatic constructions of female homoeroticism from this period relate to those in plays that came before and after? How do these same constructions relate to representations of male homoeroticism and heteroeroticism? What plays still wait to be rediscovered? What will they disclose about drama, the theatre, and the history of sexuality?

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APPENDIX: LIST OF PLAYS

INTRODUCTION

The Three Ladies of London, Robert Wilson (1581)
Satiro-Mastix, Thomas Dekker (1602)
Roaring Girl, Thomas Dekker and Thomas Middleton (1604–10)
Monsieur D'Olive, George Chapman (1605)
The Woman's Prize, John Fletcher (1610)
The Sea Voyage, Philip Massinger and John Fletcher (1622)
The Bondman, Philip Massinger (1623)
The Amorous Warre, Jasper Mayne (1628–48)
The Picture, Philip Massinger (1629)
The Hollander, Henry Glapthorne (1636)
The Antipodes, Richard Brome (1638)
Landgartha, Henry Burnell (1639–40)
The Comical Hash, Margaret Cavendish (1653–62)

1 THE EIDOLIC LESBIAN IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND

Cuck-Queanes and Cuckolds Errants, William Percy (1601)
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2 PLAYFULLY EMERGENT LESBIAN EROTICS

Clyomon and Clamydes, Anonymous (1570–83)
James IV, Robert Greene (1590)
Laelia, Anonymous (1595)
As You Like It, William Shakespeare (1598–1600)
Twelfth Night, William Shakespeare (1600–02)
Labyrinthus, Walter Hawkesworth (1603)
Ram-Alley or, Merry Trickes, Lording Barry (1607–08)
No Wit, No Help Like a Woman's, Thomas Middleton (1613–27)
Love's Pilgrimage, John Fletcher (1616)
The Widdow, Thomas Middleton with Jonson and Fletcher (1615–17)
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- The Spanish Gipsie*, Thomas Middleton and William Rowley (1623)
Love's Riddle, Abraham Cowley (1630–36)
The Rivall Friends, Peter Hausted (1632)
The Antiquary, Shackerley Marmion (1634–36)
A Madd Couple Well Matcht, Richard Brome (1639)
The Sisters, James Shirley (1642)
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3 ANXIOUSLY EMERGENT LESBIAN EROTICS

- Philaster; or, Love lies a Bleeding*, Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher
 (1608–10)
A Christian Turn'd Turke, Robert Daborne (1609–12)
Hymen's Triumph, Samuel Daniel (1614)
The Lover's Melancholy, John Ford (1628)
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Brennoralt, or the Discontented Colonel, Sir John Suckling (1640)
Orgula, Leonard Willan (1658)

4 PREDATORY LESBIAN EROTICS

- Titus Andronicus*, William Shakespeare (1594)
Il Pastor Fido: or, The Faithfull Shepheard, John Dymock [?] (1601)
The Revenger's Tragedy, Thomas Middleton (1606–07)
Pericles, William Shakespeare (1606–08)
The Golden Age, Thomas Heywood (1609–11)
Women Beware Women, Thomas Middleton (1620–27)
The Changeling, Thomas Middleton (1622)
A Game at Chess, Thomas Middleton (1624)
The Spanish Bawd, James Mabbe (1631)
Byrsa Basilea, John Rickets (1633)
The Bird in a Cage, James Shirley (1633)
Matrimonial Trouble, Margaret Cavendish (1653–62)
The Female Rebellion, H. B. (1657–59)
The Siege of Rhodes, William Davenant (1657–59)

5 UTOPIAN LESBIAN EROTICS

- Gallathea*, John Lyly (1583–85)
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The Merchant of Venice, William Shakespeare (1596–98)
As You Like It, William Shakespeare (1598–1600)
Much Ado About Nothing, William Shakespeare (1598–1600)

- Il Pastor Fido: or, The Faithfull Shepheard*, John Dymock [?] (1601)
The Isle of Guls, John Day (1606)
The Golden Age, Thomas Heywood (1609–11)
The Winter's Tale, William Shakespeare (1610–11)
The Two Noble Kinsmen, William Shakespeare and John Fletcher (1613–16)
The Loyal Subject, John Fletcher (1618)
The Pilgrim, John Fletcher (1621)
Iphis, Henry Bellamy (1621–33)
The Deserving Favourite, Lodowick Carlell (1622–29)
The Passionate Lovers, Lodowick Carlell (1629–38)
Love's Changelinges Change, Anonymous (1630–40)
The Arcadia, James Shirley (1640)
Astræa, Leonard Willan (1651)

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NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. To explain why he excluded women's desire for other women from *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare's England*, Bruce Smith wrote that "documents about female homosexuality are virtually nonexistent" and that "the literary evidence, too, is almost totally concerned with men." Smith, *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare's England; A Cultural Poetics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 27. Valerie Traub also acknowledged a "discursive silence" although she "extrapolat[ed] a cultural presence." Traub, "The (in)significance of 'lesbian' desire in early modern England," in *Erotic Politics: Desire on the Renaissance Stage*, ed. Susan Zimmerman (New York: Routledge, 1992), 164. Even Mario DiGangi, while hoping for new evidence to illuminate our understanding of early modern desire between women, wrote "the few plays that represent female homoeroticism are as yet unknown and underread." DiGangi, *The Homoerotics of Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 27. DiGangi was correct that the plays were "unknown and underread"; however, there are more than "the few" he assumed.
2. See Valerie Traub, "Recent Studies on Homoeroticism," *ELR* 30:2 (2000):284-329.
3. I have adopted the theories that Smith applied to male homosexual poetic discourse. See Smith, *Homosexual Desire*, 14-24. See also Valerie Traub, *Desire and Anxiety: Circulations of Sexuality in Shakespearean Drama* (London: Routledge, 1992), 106; and Anna Clark, "Anne Lister's Construction of Lesbian Identity," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 7.1 (1996):27.
4. Terry Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Lesbian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 1-19.
5. Lillian Faderman, "What is Lesbian Literature? Forming a Historical Canon," in *Professions of Desire: Lesbian and Gay Studies in Literature*, ed. George E. Haggerty and Bonnie Zimmerman (New York: MLA, 1996), 57.
6. Marilyn R. Farwell, "Heterosexual Plots and Lesbian Subtexts: Toward a Theory of Lesbian Narrative Space," in *Lesbian Texts and Contexts: Radical Revisions*, ed. Karla Jay and Joanne Glasgow (New York: New York University Press, 1990), 91-103 and Marilyn R. Farwell, *Heterosexual Plots and Lesbian Narratives* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 1-25.

7. Martha Vicinus, "‘They Wonder to Which Sex I Belong’: The Historical Roots of the Modern Lesbian Identity," *Feminist Studies* 18.3 (1992):467–97; Randolph Trumbach, "London’s Sapphists: From Three Sexes to Four Genders in the Making of Modern Culture," in *Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity*, ed. Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub (New York: Routledge, 1991), 112–41; Randolph Trumbach, "The Origins and Development of the Modern Lesbian Role in the Western Gender System: Northwestern Europe and the United States, 1750–1990," *Historical Reflections/Reflexions Historiques* 20.2 (1994):287–320; Lisa Moore, "‘Something More Tender Still than Friendship’: Romantic Friendship in Early-Nineteenth-Century England," *Feminist Studies* 18.3 (1992): 499–520; Emma Donoghue, *Passions Between Women: British Lesbian Culture 1668–1801* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1996), 16–24; Theo van der Meer, "Tribades on Trial: Female Same-Sex Offenders in Late-Eighteenth-Century Amsterdam," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 1.3 (1991): 424–45; E. Ann Matter, "My Sister, My Spouse: Woman-Identified Women in Medieval Christianity," in *Weaving the Visions: New Patterns in Feminist Spirituality*, ed. Judith Plaskow and Carol P. Christ (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989), 51–62; and Valerie Traub, "The Perversion of ‘Lesbian’ Desire," *History Workshop Journal* 41 (1996):23–49.
8. Martha Vicinus, "Lesbian History: All Theory and No Facts or All Facts and No Theory?" *Radical History Review* 60 (1994):60.
9. *Ibid.*, 66.
10. "Lesbian Historiography Before the Name," *GLQ* 4.4 (1998):561.
11. *Ibid.*, 582–88.
12. *Ibid.*, 614–21.
13. I have also chosen to use the term "lesbian" in the chapter titles to position this study within lesbian historiography.
14. Theodora A. Jankowski, *Pure Resistance: Queer Virginity in Early Modern English Drama* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 8.
15. *Ibid.*, 28.
16. Kathryn Schwarz, *Tough Love: Amazon Encounter in the English Renaissance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 6–7.
17. Harriette Andreadis, *Sappho in Early Modern England: Female Same-Sex Literary Erotics 1550–1714* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 1–3.
18. Valerie Traub, *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 158–87.
19. *Ibid.*, 170.
20. *Ibid.*, 181.
21. In his article "Female–Female Eroticism and the Early Modern Stage" [*Renaissance Drama* 24 (1993):24], Douglas Bruster argued that textual representations of female–female erotic energy existed within

- a “sexually imaginable” space. Bruster maintains that a “cultural myth” regarding “female–female eroticism” could be discerned from certain classical and contemporary narratives in early modern England. According to Bruster, the theatre “rarely imagined mutually pleasurable erotic relations among the female bodies it represented.” Instead, erotic relations between female characters were invested with male desires inscribed and received through heterosexual narratives of “potentially unequal levels of power and pleasure” (3–5). I agree with Bruster that literary narratives available in early modern England constitute a cultural awareness, however fictive, of female–female eroticism. However, I disagree that playwrights and spectators filtered such narratives, when they appeared on stage, primarily through heteroerotic or heterosexual assumptions. Rather, dramatists and audiences relied on the “cultural myth” to read the erotic implications of scenes between female characters.
22. Tracey Sedinger, “‘If Sight and Shape be True’: The Epistemology of Crossdressing on the London Stage,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 48.1 (1998):78. Sedinger writes that “the spectator’s relation to the crossdresser becomes crucial when we turn to plays in which crossdressing is a significant plot device and in which the split between ignorant spectators (within the play) and spectators-in-the-know both forwards the narrative and produces aesthetic and erotic pleasure.” Unfortunately, Both Sedinger and Bruster see homoerotic constructions as voyeuristic representations solely for the pleasure of the audience and deny that the characters are meant to experience or possess homoerotic affinities. While that may be true in certain situations, it is by no means true of all plays that present constructions of homoerotic desire and severely limits the narrative function of the construct.
 23. Film in the first half of the twentieth century in the United States functioned similarly under the early production code. Richard Maltby explains that Hollywood musicals and screwball comedy relied on its audience’s “preexistent knowledge” of sexuality to read the erotic events in ambiguously constructed plots. Deliberate ambiguity, in language and characterization, created a “textual indeterminacy” that positioned the spectator as the creator of narrative signification. Of course, twentieth-century media and early modern drama exist in very different cultural spheres. Maltby, “The Production Code and the Hays Office,” in *Grand Design: Hollywood as a Modern Business Enterprise, 1930–1939*, ed. Tino Balio, *History of the American Cinema* vol. 5 (New York: Scribner’s, 1993), 40–41, 64–65. My thanks to Sarah Kozloff for this reference to Maltby’s thesis.
 24. Brantôme, *Lives of Gallant Ladies*, trans. Alec Brown (London: Elek Books, 1961), 128–37. For the date of this work see Georg Harsdörfer, Introduction, *Lives of Fair and Gallant Ladies*, trans. A. R. Allinson (New York: Liveright, 1933), especially xxviii.
 25. See Brantôme, *The Lives of Gallant Ladies*, xiv.

26. Elizabeth Susan Wahl, *Invisible Relations: Representations of Female Intimacy in the Age of Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 45–52.
27. See Agnolo Firenzuola, *On the Beauty of Women*, trans., ed. Konrad Eisenbichler and Jacqueline Murray (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 16–17. Firenzuola's speaker, Celso, tells the story of Jove cleaving in half the earliest men and women, who he created double. Most of these first beings had both male and female sides, but some were entirely male and others exclusively female. Humans naturally desire to return to this original state and so seek their other half, either an opposite or same sex partner. Celso explains:

Those who were female in both halves, or are descended from those who were, love each other's beauty, some in purity and holiness, as the elegant Laudomia Forteguerria loves the most illustrious Margaret of Austria, some lasciviously, as in ancient times Sappho from Lesbos and in our own times in Rome the great prostitute Cecilia Venetiana. This type of woman by nature spurns marriage and flees from intimate conversation with us men. And, we must believe, these women are those who willingly become nuns and willingly remain so, and they are few, because the majority of women are kept in monasteries by force and live there in despair.
28. One of Aretino's biographers argues that this "pornographic" text, that includes scenes of orgies, bestiality, and flagellation, did not startle its sixteenth-century audience. See James Cleugh, *The Divine Aretino: Pietro of Arezzo, 1492–1556: A Biography* (London: Anthony Bland, 1965), 209–15. Ian Moulton's discussion of Aretino provides a more complex analysis of his work. Ian Frederick Moulton, *Before Pornography, Erotic Writing in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 119–57.
29. Pietro Aretino, *The Ragionamenti: The Lives of Nuns, The Lives of Married Women, The Lives of Courtesans* (London: Libra Collection, 1970), 31. Moulton (*Before Pornography*, 130) identifies this scene as the bawdiest in the text.
30. Aretino, *Ragionamenti*, 49.
31. Pietro Aretino, *Dialogues [Ragionamenti]*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal (New York: Marsilio, 1994), 350.
32. Moulton, *Before Pornography*, 146–57.
33. Saad El-Gabalawy, "Allusions to Aretino's Pornography," *American Notes & Queries* 13 (1974):35–36.
34. H. S. D. Mithal, ed., *An Edition of Robert Wilson's Three Ladies of London and Three Lords and Three Ladies of London* (New York: Garland, 1988), xxi; and Irene Mann, "The Text of the Plays of Robert Wilson" (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1942), 212. Gosson reads: "Whether this be the practise of *Poets* in these dayes you

may perceiue by the drift of him that wrote the play termed *The Three Ladies of London*, which in the Catastrophe maketh *Love* and *Conscience* to be examined how thrie good ladihippes like of playes? *Love* answeres that she detesteth them, because her guttes are tourned outward, and all her secret conueighaunce, is blased with colours to the peoples eye. *Conscience* like a kindharted gentlewoman doth alow them" (sig. D1v–D2). See Stephen Gosson, *Playes Confuted in Five Actions* (London, n.d.).

35. See Lloyd Edward Kermode, "The Playwright's Prophecy: Robert Wilson's *The Three Ladies of London* and the 'Alienation' of the English," *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 11 (1999):60–87; and Daryl W. Palmer, "Merchants and Miscegenation: *The Three Ladies of London*, *The Jew of Malta*, and *The Merchant of Venice*," in *Race, Ethnicity, and Power in the Renaissance*, ed. Joyce Green MacDonald (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1997), 36–66.
36. Robert Wilson, *A Right Excellent and Famous Comædy Called The Three Ladies of London* (London, 1584). Subsequent quotations are from this edition.
37. Henry Glapthorne, *The Hollander, A Comedy written 1635. The Author Henry Glapthorne And now Printed as it was then Acted at the Cock-pit in Drury Lane, by their Majesties Servants, with good allowance. And at the Court before both their Majesties* (London, 1640).
38. Beaumont, Francis and John Fletcher, *Comedies and Tragedies. Written by Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, Gentlemen. Never printed before, And now published by the Authours Originall Copies* (London, 1647).
39. Philip Massinger, *The Picture A Tragedycomedy, As it was often presented with good allowance, at the Globe, and Blacke-Friers Play-houses, by the Kings Majesties servants* (London, 1630). Subsequent quotations are from this edition.
40. George Chapman, *Monsieur D'Olive. A Comedie, as it was sundrie times acted by her Majesties children at the Blacke-Friers* (London, 1606). See also DiGangi, *Homoerotics*, 97.
41. Jasper Mayne, *The Amorous Warre. A Tragi-Comædy* (London, 1648).
42. H[enry] B[urnell], *Landgartha. A Tragie-Comedy, as it was presented in the new Theater in Dublin, with good applause, being an Ancient story, Written by H. B.* (Dublin, 1641).
43. Beaumont, Francis and John Fletcher, *Comedies and Tragedies*.
44. Fiona McNeill, "Gynocentric London Spaces: (Re)Locating Masterless Women in Early Stuart Drama," *Renaissance Drama* 28 (1997):222, 233. This scene in *The Woman's Prize* calls to mind a reference in Thomas Harman's *A Caveat for Common Cursitors, Vulgarly Called Vagabonds*. Among "seven score" beggars camped out in a barn, Harman's eyewitness recalls "every of them having his

woman, except it were two women that lay alone together for some especyall cause" (sig. Aiiiiv). [Thomas Harman, *A Caveat or Warening For Commen Cursetors Vulgarely Called Vagabones* (London, 1567). I want to thank Linda Woodbridge for pointing me toward this reference.] Heather Dubrow reads this passage from Harman as a possible homoerotic reference, although she discusses its ambiguity. [See Heather Dubrow, *Shakespeare and Domestic Loss: Forms of Deprivation, Mourning, and Recuperation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 36, 78.] The phrase "alone together" highlights, in its oxymoronic way, the fact that these women remained separate from the men in female pairs. However, it is not clear that they have done so for sexual gratification, even though Harman explains that the activity in the barn ends in general debauchery.

45. Margaret Cavendish, *Playes Written by the Thrice Noble, Illustrious and Excellent Princess, The Lady Marchioness of New Castle* (London, 1662).
46. Philip Massinger, *The Bond-man: An Antient Storie. As it hath been often Acted with good allowance, at the Cock-pit in Drury-lane: by the most Excellent Princess, the Lady Elizabeth her Servants* (London, 1624), emphasis mine. The scene, which focuses on Corisca's incestuous seduction of her stepson Asotus, has further engagement with female homoerotics in a complicated fabrication between Corisca, her maid Zanthia, and Asotus. Zanthia, in the guise of Asotus's lover's maid, tells Asotus: "Some times / I lie with my Ladie, as the last night I did, / Shee could not say her prayers, for thinking of you, / Nay, she talked of you in her sleepe, and sigh'd out, / O sweet Asotus, sure thou art so backward, / That I must ravish thee, and in that fervor / She tooke me in her armes, threw me upon her, / Kis'd me, and hug'd me, and then wak'd, and wept, / Because 'twas but a dreame" (sig. E2). The scene suggests that in segregated societies or in the absence of a particular male companion women turned to other women for sexual fulfillment, whether consciously or not.
47. Richard Brome, *The Antipodes*, ed. Ann Haaker, Regents Renaissance Drama Series (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), 20. Subsequent quotations are from this edition.
48. Thomas Dekker, *Satiromastix; or, the untrussing of the Humorous Poet, As it hath bin presented publikely, by the Right Honorable, the Lord Chamberlaine his Servants; and privately, by the Children of Pauls* (London, 1602). I am grateful to Ann Imbrie for directing me to this quotation.
49. DiGangi, *Homoerotics*, 96.
50. Traub, *Renaissance of Lesbianism*, 61.
51. Mary Beth Rose, "Women in Men's Clothing: Apparel and Social Stability in *The Roaring Girl*," *ELR* 14.3 (1984):368.
52. For example, Jo E. Miller, "Women and the Market in *The Roaring Girl*, *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme* 26.1 (1990):11–23, argues "that even without being aware of it, Moll

- might also manage to disrupt even the play's containment of her" (12). In contrast, Jane Baston, "Rehabilitating Moll's Subversion in *The Roaring Girl*," *SEL* 37 (1997):317–35, suggests "that the vision of the play is far more reactionary than radical" (320), arguing that the play "subtly but thoroughly stages Moll's recuperation" (320). Lloyd Edward Kermode, in "Destination Doomsday: Desires for Change and Changeable Desires in *The Roaring Girl*," *ELR* 27.3 (1997):421–42, reverts to Rose's original premise of the contradictions surrounding the character. Kermode finds that the public and private persona Moll presents are radically different. See also Patrick Cheney, "Moll Cutpurse as Hermaphrodite in Dekker and Middleton's *The Roaring Girl*," *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme* 19.2 (1983):120–34; Jonathan Dollimore, "Subjectivity, Sexuality, and Transgression: The Jacobean Connection," *Renaissance Drama* 17 (1986):53–81; Susan E. Krantz, "The Sexual Identities of Moll Cutpurse in Dekker and Middleton's *The Roaring Girl* and in London," *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme* 19.1 (1995) n.s.: 5–20; and Valerie Forman, "Marked Angels: Counterfeits, Commodities, and *The Roaring Girl*," *Renaissance Quarterly* 54 (2001):1531–60.
53. Stephen Orgel, "The Subtexts of *The Roaring Girl*," in *Erotic Politics: Desire on the Renaissance Stage*, ed. Susan Zimmerman (New York: Routledge, 1992), 15–18.
 54. Jean E. Howard, "Sex and Social Conflict; The Erotics of *The Roaring Girl*," in *Erotic Politics: Desire on the Renaissance Stage*, ed. Susan Zimmerman (New York: Routledge, 1992), 175. See also Jankowski, *Pure Resistance*, 185–93, who, agreeing with Howard, identifies Moll on the highest plain of "queer virginity" because she rejects patriarchal sexual economy and has the means to avoid marriage altogether.
 55. Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker, *The Roaring Girl*, ed. Paul A. Mulholland, The Revels Plays (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), 109. Subsequent quotations are from this edition.
 56. Marjorie Garber, "The Logic of the Transvestite: *The Roaring Girl*," in *Staging the Renaissance: Reinterpretations of Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama*, ed. David Scott Kastan and Peter Stallybrass (New York: Routledge, 1991), 223–24.
 57. Howard, "Sex and Social Conflict," 184–85.
 58. See Elaine Hobby, "'My affection hath an unknown bottom': homosexuality and the teaching of *As You Like It*," in *Shakespeare in a Changing Curriculum*, ed. Lesley Aers and Nigel Wheale (London: Routledge, 1991), 125–42; Laurie E. Osborne, *The Trick of Singularity: Twelfth Night and the Performance Editions* (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 1996), 96–104; Casey Charles, "Gender Trouble in *Twelfth Night*," *Theatre Journal* 49.1 (1997):121–41; Theodora Jankowski, "'Where There Can Be No Cause of Affection': Redefining Virgins,

Their Desires, and Their Pleasures in John Lyly's *Gallathea*," in *Feminist Readings of Early Modern Culture: Emerging Subjects*, ed. Dymphna Callaghan, M. Lindsay Kaplan, and Valerie Traub (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Phyllis Rackin, "Androgyny, Mimesis, and the Marriage of the Boy Heroine on the English Renaissance Stage," *PMLA* 102 (1987):29–41; DiGangi, *Homoerotics*, 39–41, 50–4 and Traub, *Desire and Anxiety*, 122–44.

1 THE EIDOLIC LESBIAN IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND

1. Both Smith and Traub discuss the contradictory nature of the legal, religious, moral, and literary responses to male homosexual experience in early modern England. See Smith, *Homosexual Desire*, 11–22, and Traub, *Desire and Anxiety*, 106.
2. Judith Brown, "Lesbian Sexuality in Medieval and Early Modern Europe," in *Hidden From History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*, ed. Martin Duberman, Martha Vicinus, and George Chauncey, Jr. (New York: Meridian, 1989), 67–75; Louis Crompton, "The Myth of Lesbian Impurity: Capital Laws from 1270 to 1791," *Journal of Homosexuality* 6.1/2 (1980/81):14.
3. Pierre J. Payer, *Sex and the Penitentials: The Development of a Sexual Code, 550–1150* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 138. For the quotation see, John T. McNeill and Helena M. Gamer, *Medieval Handbooks of Penance: A translation of the principal libri poenitentiales and selections from related documents* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938), 185.
4. Payer, *Sex and the Penitentials*, 92, 93, 95, 99, 108, 112; see also Pierre J. Payer, "The Humanism of the Penitentials and the Continuity of the Penitential Tradition," *Mediaeval Studies* 46 (1984):341–42.
5. St. Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica of St Thomas Aquinas*, 2.2. QQ. CXL–CLXX, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne, 1921), 158. Aquinas goes on to debate the gravity of same-sex sexual activity and dismisses the argument that adultery, seduction, and rape are worse offenses since they injure another party, but "unnatural vice" concerns only love between individuals.
6. Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c. 1400–c. 1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 4.
7. Judith C. Brown, *Immodest Acts: the Life of a Lesbian Nun in Renaissance Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 6. See also Bernadette J. Brooten, *Love Between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 189–358 whose extensive study details the early theological reaction to female homoeroticism.

8. Brown, *Immodest Acts*, 9–13. Leslie J. Moran sees the relative legal silence surrounding female–female sexual activity as a symptom of gender. She identifies homosexuality as a male identity primarily because early modern culture supposedly rendered relations between females insignificant, while those of males demanded attention. Leslie J. Moran, *The Homosexual(ity) of Law* (London: Routledge, 1996), 13.
9. Crompton, “The Myth of Lesbian Impunity,” 11–25.
10. See also Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men* (New York: Morrow, 1981), 1–74 and Jeannette H. Foster, *Sex Variant Women in Literature* (Florida: Naiad, 1985), 30–50.
11. Crompton, “The Myth of Lesbian Impunity,” 17–19; Brown, *Immodest Acts*, 3–20. See also Derrick Sherwin Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1955), 142; Ruthann Robson, *Lesbian (Outlaw): Survival Under the Rule of Law* (Ithaca, New York: Firebrand Books, 1992), 36–38; and E. William Monter, “Sodomy and Heresy in Early Modern Switzerland,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 6.1/2 (1980/81): 46–47.
12. Brown, “Lesbian Sexuality,” 73; Faderman, *Surpassing*, 47, 47–51; Robson, *Lesbian (Outlaw)*, 33–34.
13. Matter makes a similar claim in regard to medieval condemnation of female/female sexual activity. Though all same-sex sexual activity between women was condemned, any attempt at imitating male genitalia was more severely punished. See Matter, “My Sister, My Spouse,” 58–59. Brooten theorizes that in the ancient world sexual relations between women in general were condemned to support the “social structures of male dominance and female subordination.” Brooten, *Love Between Women*, 24.
14. Henri Estienne, *Apologie pour Hérodote*, ed. Isidore Liseux. vol. 1 (1566; Paris, 1879), 178.
15. Michel de Montaigne, *The Journal of Montaigne’s Travels in Italy by Way of Switzerland and Germany in 1580 and 1581*, ed. and trans. W. G. Waters, vol. 1 (London: John Murray, 1903), 36–38.
16. For other early modern cases involving transvestite women in erotic or sexual relationships with other women, see also Catalina de Erauso, Michele Stepto, and Gabriel Stepto, *Lieutenant Nun: Memoir of a Basque Transvestite in the New World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996); Rudolf M. Dekker and Lotte C. van de Pol, *Tradition of Female Transvestism in Early Modern Europe* (London: Macmillan Press, 1989), 55–63; Helmut Puff, “Female Sodomy: The Trial of Katherina Hetzeldorfer,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 30.1 (2000):41–61; Jacqueline Murray, “Twice Marginal and Twice Invisible: Lesbians in the Middle Ages,” *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, ed. Vern Bullough and James Brundage (New York: Garland, 1996), 191–222, especially 202–03; Patricia Crawford and Sara Mendelson, “Sexual Identities in Early Modern England: The

- Marriage of Two Women in 1680," *Gender & History* 7.3 (1995):362–77.
17. Nicolas de Nicolay, *Navigations into Turkie* (1585; New York: Da Capo Press, 1968), sig. H8. See also Bruster, "Female–Female Eroticism," 8 and DiGangi, *Homoerotics*, 95–96. Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq, the Flemish Ambassador to Turkey, provides corroboration for Nicolay's account in the published version of his ambassadorial letters: "so cases occur of women falling in love with one another at these baths, in much the same fashion as young men fall in love with maidens in our country." Quoted in Traub, *Renaissance of Lesbianism*, 200.
 18. Crompton, "The Myth of Lesbian Impunity," 11 and Alan Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* (London: Gay Men's Press, 1982), 17.
 19. John Bridges, *A Defence of the Government Established in the Church of Englande for Ecclesiasticall Matters* (London, 1587), 757.
 20. Traub, *Renaissance of Lesbianism*, 63.
 21. Erasmus, *The Colloquies of Erasmus*, trans. Craig R. Thompson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 99–108.
 22. John Bale, *The first two partes of the Actes of a chaste example of the Englysh votaryes, gathered out of their owne legenades and chronycles by Johan Bale, and dedycated to our most educated soveraigne kynge Edward the fyrste* (London, 1548).
 23. Tribade, a French word from the Greek *tribas*, and fricatrice, from the Latin *fricatricx* come from continental anatomical treatises. These texts explain that a woman with an enlarged clitoris could satisfy herself sexually by rubbing against or penetrating another woman. Descriptions of such behavior appear in Gabriele Falloppia's 1561 *Observationes anatomicae*, Jacques Daléchamps's 1570 *Chirurgie françoise*, Ambroise Paré's 1575 *Des Monstres et Prodiges*, and André Du Laurens's 1595 *Historia anatomica humani corporis et singularum eius partium multis*. See Traub, *Renaissance of Lesbianism*, 188–228. The word tribade also found its way into English medical works or translations of continental works such as Helkiah Crooke's 1615 *Microcosmographia*, John Bulwer's 1654 *Anthropometamorphosis*, and the 1645 English translation of Jacques Ferrand's *Erotomania* (titled *Erotomania, or a Treatise on Love Sickness*. See Theresa Braunschneider, "The Macroclitoride, the Tribade and the Woman: Configuring Gender and Sexuality in English Anatomical Discourse," *Textual Practice* 13.3 (1999):514–15. John Pory's 1600 translation of Leo Africanus also contains the word "Fricatrices" in his description of the witches of Fez. See Leo Africanus, *Johannes Leo A Geographical Historie of Africa*, The English Experience 133 (1600; New York: Da Capo Press, 1969), 148.
 24. Ben Jonson, *The Complete Poetry of Ben Jonson*, ed. William B. Hunter (New York: New York University Press, 1963), 97 (l. 17). Jonson depicts the Graces as three embracing naked women, hence their tribadic potential.

25. Ibid., 205 (l. 7–8).
26. Ben Jonson, *Volpone, or the Fox*, rev. ed. Brian Parker, The Revels Plays (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 224.
27. W[illiam] P[ercy], *Comaedyes and Pastoralls with their Songs, As Also one Booke of Epigrammes*, Ms. HM4, Huntington Library, California, n.p. The manuscript itself is dated 1647; however, each of the six plays included are separately dated. This rather simple comedy represents unusual sexual pairings. Two men desert their wives and take up with a woman who dresses like her husband, a forester. The two wives, having been abandoned, plan to join Elizabeth I at Tilbury, but become involved with the forester. All six eventually meet and sort themselves back into couples.
28. Brooten, *Love Between Women*, 42–57.
29. Martial, *Epigrams*, ed. and trans. D. R. Shackleton Bailey (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).
30. Ovid, *The Heroycall Epistles of the Learned Poet Publius Ovidius Naso, In Englishe Verse*, trans. George Turberville (London: Henry Denham, 1567), 109v.
31. Ibid., 116r.
32. Quoted in Michael Pincombe, “Lyly and Lesbianism: Mysteries of the Closet in *Sappho and Phao*,” in *Renaissance Configurations: Voices/Bodies/Spaces, 1580–1690* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998), 102.
33. Henry Bellamy, *Iphis*, Renaissance Latin Drama in England, First Series, vol. 10 (New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1982). See chapter 5 for a discussion of Bellamy’s play.
34. Ovid, *The XV Bookes of P. Ovidius Naso, entytuled Metamorphosis, translated oute of Latin into English meeter*, trans. Arthur Golding (London: William Seres, 1567). Subsequent quotations are from this edition.
35. John Donne, *The Complete Poems of John Donne*, ed. Alexander B. Grosart, vol. 2 (London, 1873), 103–05. Subsequent quotations are from this edition.
36. Janel Mueller, “Troping Utopia: Donne’s Brief for Lesbianism,” in *Sexuality and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, ed. James Grantham Turner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 192. The poem has elicited a number of critical responses. For example, Stella P. Revard thinks that Donne’s idealization of female same-sex love comes from his imitation of Sappho’s poetry. Stella P. Revard, “The Sapphic Voice in Donne’s ‘Sappho to Philaenis,’” in *Renaissance Discourses of Desire*, ed. Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1993), 63–76. In one of the earliest critiques of the poem’s representation of female homoeroticism, James Holstun contends that “though ‘Sapho to Philaenis’ does consider lesbian eroticism with considerable imaginative sympathy,” Donne’s structure and language—his use of metaphor and simile—force “lesbian desire into an inarticulate silence.” James Holstun, “‘Will you Rent our Ancient Love Asunder?’: Lesbian Elegy in

- Donne, Marvel, and Milton," *ELH* 54.4 (1987):835–67. Following Holstun, Elizabeth Harvey agrees that the poem "seems to present an idyllic world of lesbian congress," but argues that it ultimately renders Sappho neurotic and sterile. Elizabeth D. Harvey, "Ventriloquizing Sappho, or the Lesbian Muse," in *Re-reading Sappho: Reception and Transmission*, ed. Ellen Greene (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 100. Paula Blank, although agreeing that Donne leaves Sappho's desire "unfulfilled," takes Mueller's side in arguing for its commendation of female–female love. Paula Blank, "Comparing Sappho to Philaenis: John Donne's 'Homopoetics,'" *PMLA* 110.3 (1995):359. C. Annette Grise argues that the poem challenges the Ovidian tradition of a plaintive, heterosexual Sappho but that Donne ultimately rejects the female homoerotics he creates as unsustainable and transitory. C. Annette Grise, "Depicting Lesbian Desire: Contexts for John Donne's 'Sappho to Philaenis,'" *Mosaic (Winnipeg)* 29.4 (1996):41–58. In *The Enigmatic Narrator*, George Klawitter offers an alternate reading of Donne's poem as articulating desire between two men. George Klawitter, *The Enigmatic Narrator: The Voicing of Same-Sex Love in the Poetry of John Donne* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994), 51–61.
37. William Warner, *Albions England: A Continued Historie of the Same Kingdome, From the Originals of the First Inhabitants thereof: And most the chiefe Alterations and Accidents there hapning: unto, and in, the happie Raigne of our now most gracious Sovereigne Queene Elizabeth* (London: Widow Orwin, 1597), 51. I am grateful to Robert Maslen for this reference.
 38. Sir Philip Sidney, *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia (The New Arcadia)*, ed. Victor Skretkovicz (1590; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 148–49.
 39. Richard A. Levin reads this passage in his article "What? How? Female–Female Desire in Sidney's *New Arcadia* [*Criticism* 39.4 (1997):464] and concludes that it represents an "explicit" passage of female homoerotic desire and suggests the "possibility of sexual activity between" two women.
 40. See also Schwarz, *Tough Love*, 176–201 who reads the homoerotic possibilities in the *Old Arcadia*. Schwarz presents an important caution when reading homoerotics in narratives that involve a male character dressed as a woman. She states, "I want to stress that we do not have to abandon desire between women as a temporary fiction simply because the ending tells us to" (182). Heterosexual assumptions might trump homoerotic desires in these fictions, but fail to negate their existence.
 41. *The Troublesome and Hard Adventures in Love*, trans. R. C. (London: Thomas Creede, 1594), Q3r. [This British Library copy appears to be the version of a book that Thomas Creede entered in the Stationer's

- Register in June of 1594 and identified as a translation from the French by R. C. However, the text is in poor condition, missing the title page, and its origins are doubtful.]
42. A dramatic version of the story also appears under the title *Miracle de la fille d'un roy* in the French medieval collection of confraternity plays labeled *Miracles de Nostre Dame par personnages*. See Robert L. A. Clark and Claire Sponsler, "Queer Play: The Cultural Work of Crossdressing in Medieval Drama," *New Literary History* 28 (1997):323–27. In fact, multiple narratives of the cross-dressed heroine succeeding at a foreign court and/or becoming the object of another woman's attraction exist in several early romance fictions. See Valerie R. Hotchkiss, *Clothes Make the Man: Female Cross Dressing in Medieval Europe* (New York: Garland, 1996), 106–07 who finds common elements in the *Roman de Silence*, *Yde et Olive*, *Tristan de Nanteuil*, *Ovide moralisé*, and *L'Estoire de Merlin*. Keith V. Sinclair, *Tristan De Nanteuil: Thematic Infrastructure and Literary Creation* (Tübingen, Germany: Max Niemeyer Verlag Tübingen, 1983), 38–42 and 98–105, also traces the similarities between these tales. Lucy Allen Paton, "The Story of Grisandole: A Study in the Legend of Merlin," *PMLA* 22 (1902):234–76, studied the convention of the cross-dressed woman in early modern texts long before Hotchkiss and Sinclair and found aspects of the legend in West Asian sources. The story of Ide and Olive also bears similarities to a supposedly sixteenth-century tale described by Jeanette Foster in her remarkable study *Sex Variant Women in Literature*. The story graphically recounts the erotic adventures of the princess Amany who, dressed as a man to avoid an unwanted suitor, rescues and later marries the princess Dorrat of India. The version of their story describes a wedding night of more intimate and sexual contact than the "clipping and kissing" of Ide and Olive. See *Oriental Stories (La Fleur Lascive Orientale) Being a Recueil of Joyous Stories Hitherto Unpublished, Translated From Arabian, Mongolian, Japanese, Indian, Tamil, Chinese, Persian, Malayan, and Other Sources* (Athens: Erotika Biblion Society, 1893), 37–58.
 43. *The Ancient, Honorable, Famous, and delightfull Historie of Huon of Bourdeaux, one of the Peeres of Fraunce, and Duke of Guyenne* [trans. John Bouchier], (London, 1601). Subsequent quotations are from this edition.
 44. Diane Watt, "Read My Lips: Clippyng and Kyssyng in the Early Sixteenth Century," in *Queerly Phrased: Language, Gender, and Sexuality*, ed. Anna Livia and Kira Hall (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 169. Watt uses an earlier version of Bouchier's translation which in fact contains the word "buggery" to describe the relationship between Ide and Olive. By 1601, in an edition that the title page states "corrected and amended" the "rude English" of its predecessors, that word was altered to "falsehood."

45. Ludovico Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso*, trans. John Harrington, ed. Robert McNulty (1591; Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), 279. Subsequent quotations are from this edition.
46. Lauren Silberman, *Transforming Desire: Erotic Knowledge in Books III and IV of The Faerie Queene* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 29–33.
47. Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A. C. Hamilton, Hiroshi Yamashita, and Toshiyuki Suzuki (Harlow, England: Longman, 2001) 299. Subsequent quotations are from this edition.
48. See Camille A. Paglia, “The Apollonian Androgyne and the *Faerie Queene*,” *ELR* 9.1 (1979):50–51; Dorothy Stephens, *The Limits of Eroticism in Post-Petrarchan Narrative: Conditional Pleasure from Spenser to Marvell* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 34–43; Traub, *Renaissance of Lesbianism*, 58. Stephens believes that Britomart maintains her masculine appearance specifically to engage Amoret in a homoerotic flirtation. She argues that “by keeping her helmet on, Britomart can afford to raise the dialogue to a higher erotic pitch, engaging in a closer intimacy than would otherwise be allowable” (37).
49. In “Le feu caché: Homosocial Bonds Between Women in a Renaissance Romance,” [*Renaissance Quarterly* 45.2 (1992):293–311] Winfried Schleiner argues that the French version of *Amadis de Gaule*, an enormously popular romance narrative, influenced writers such as Spenser, Sidney, and Donne. Schleiner focuses his essay on the homoerotic adventures of Oronce and La belle Sauvage; two women who dress as knights and both attract and are attracted to various women they encounter in their travels. Britomart echoes these two former martial maids. On the popularity of *Amadis de Gaule* in England, see John O’Connor, *Amadis de Gaule and Its Influence in England* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1970).
50. Geoffrey Bullough, ed., *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, vol. 2 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958), 225–52.
51. Filesmena appears as a “strange Shepherdess” (sig. E1v) to save three nymphs and several shepherds from three wild savages bent on rape and murder. She is outfitted with bow, arrows, and steel piked staff, which she wields dexterously in killing the savages. She then tells her story of Don Felix to those she saved.
52. Jorge de Montemayor, *Diana of George of Montemayor: Translated out of Spanish into English by Bartholomew Yong of the Middle Temple Gentleman* (London, 1598). Subsequent quotations are from this edition.
53. One commentator on Montemayor identifies the homoerotics implicit in this scene and argues that they are natural elements of the pastoral form. However, he also displays his discomfort with the subject by stating that the Christian ethic that permeated Spanish culture kept the material from being “obscene.” See Bruno M. Damiani,

- La Diana of Montemayor as Social & Religious Teaching* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1983), 48–49.
54. See Ian Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman: A Study in the Fortunes of Scholasticism and Medical Science in European Intellectual Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980). Rackin gives a helpful summary of some of the scholarly debate about the position of women in early modern English society. See Rackin, “Androgyny,” 32. Women’s gender roles, according to Jankowski, were in a state of flux and a good deal of mobility in gender and gender relations meant that the position of women could be seen in various lights. See Theodora A. Jankowski, *Women in Power in the Early Modern Drama* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 22–53. See also Mihoko Suzuki, “Gender, Class, and the Social Order in Late Elizabethan Drama,” *Theatre Journal* 44 (1992):31–45.
 55. I use the word “gender” to refer to the sociocultural attributes of masculinity and femininity. The word “sex” I use to refer to the biological components that generally signify a body to be either male or female. I see these two categories as fairly distinct. That is, a body biologically identified as female is expected to perform gendered behaviors that signify its femininity to a greater or lesser degree. Therefore, an individual who has a female body may be termed “masculine” by her society if she exhibits gender attributes that are culturally understood to signify a male body. See Suzanne J. Kessler and Wendy McKenna, *Gender: An Ethnomethodological Approach* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).
 56. Maclean, *Renaissance Notion of Woman*, 8 and 35.
 57. Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 124–25.
 58. See the introductions of both Mary Beth Rose, *The Expense of Spirit: Love and Sexuality in English Renaissance Drama* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988) and Maryanne Cline Horowitz, J. R. Brink, and Allison Courdet, eds, *Playing with Gender: A Renaissance Pursuit* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991). See also Traub, “(in) significance,” 151 and Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, “Fetishizing Gender: Constructing the Hermaphrodite in Renaissance Europe,” in *Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity*, ed. Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub (New York: Routledge, 1991), 81.
 59. See Katherine Usher Henderson and Barbara F. McManus, *Half Humankind: Contexts and Texts of the Controversy About Women in England, 1540–1640* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985). See also the introduction by Cristina Malcolmson and Mihoko Suzuki in *Debating Gender in Early Modern England, 1500–1700* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 1–12, for an overview of contemporary scholarly approaches to the debate.
 60. Linda Woodbridge, *Women and the English Renaissance: Literature and the Nature of Womanhood, 1540–1620* (Chicago: University of

- Illinois Press, 1984), 129 and 323–27. Woodbridge analyzes how the debate influenced literature and argues that it was primarily a rhetorical exercise.
61. English writers translated Agrippa's popular text three separate times—Thomas Clapham in 1542 and Henry Care in both 1652 and 1670. Agrippa's was only one of the cultural arguments in support of women that appeared in England. For others see Kate Aughterson, ed., *Renaissance Woman: A Sourcebook, Constructions of Femininity in England* (London: Routledge, 1995), 261–90.
 62. Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim, *A Treatise of the Nobilitie and excellencye of woman kynde, translated out of Latine into englysshe by David Clapam* (London, 1542).
 63. *Haec-Vir: Or, The Womanish-Man: Being an Answer to a Late Booke Intituled Hic-Mulier. Exprest in a Brief Dialogue Between Haec-Vir, the Womanish-Man, and Hic-Mulier, the Man-Woman* (London, 1620), B2–B2v.
 64. Jordan writes that “[I]t was only logical for some feminists [early modern women] to argue either directly or by implication that sex and gender were different. Sex, they believed, was innate; gender was *assigned* by cultural expectations to forms of behavior, . . . and was *variable*. . . .” See Constance Jordan, *Renaissance Feminism: Literary Texts and Political Models* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 134.
 65. Aileen Ribeiro, *Dress and Morality* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1986), 72.
 66. The debate reached its peak with the *Hic Mulier* and *Haec-Vir* pamphlets published in 1620. In the same year James I entered the debate by encouraging his clergy to admonish women: “Yesterday the Bishop of London called together all his clergy about this town, and told them he had express commandment from the King to will them to inveigh vehemently against the insolency of our women, and their wearing of broad brimmed hats, their hair cut short or shorn, and some of them stilletoes or poinards, and such other trinkets of the moment; adding withal that if pulpit admonitions will not reform them he would proceed by another course; the truth is the world is very much out of order, but whether this will mend it God knows.” Quoted in Angeline Goreau, *The Whole Duty of a Woman: Female Writers in Seventeenth-Century England* (New York: Dial Press, 1985), 91.
 67. William Harrison, *The Description of England*, ed. Georges Edelen (1587; Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1960), 147.
 68. See Jean Howard, “Crossdressing, The Theatre, and Gender Struggle in Early Modern England,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 39 (1988):420.
 69. George Gascoigne, *The Steele Glas: Complainte of Phylomene*, *The English Experience* 597 (1576; New York: Da Capo Press, 1973), I.i.v.
 70. Barnabe Riche, *Barnabe Riche His Farewell to Military Profession*, ed. Donald Beecher, *Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies* 91 (1581; Ottawa: Dovehouse Editions, 1992), 128–29. For example, in

- 1596 one Joan Towler of Essex was charged in an ecclesiastical court for wearing men's apparel to church. Paul Hair, *Before the Bawdy Court: Selections from church court and other records relating to the correction of moral offenses in England, Scotland and New England, 1300–1800* (London: Paul Elek Books, 1972), 37.
71. Philip Stubbes, *The Anatomie of Abuses*, ed. Frederick J. Furnivall, New Shakespeare Society Publications Series. 6 Nos. 4, 6, 12 (1583; Vaduz: Kraus Reprint, 1965), 73.
 72. Laura Levine, *Men in Women's Clothing: Anti-theatricality and Effeminization, 1579 to 1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 10–25.
 73. Michael Shapiro, *Gender in Play on the Shakespearean Stage: Boy Heroines and Female Pages* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 24.
 74. *Ibid.*, 18.
 75. *Ibid.*, 24. See also Victor O. Freeburg, *Disguise Plots in Elizabethan Drama* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1915), 61, who calls the cross-dressed heroine “the most graceful and charming figure on the stage.”
 76. Jean Howard, *The Stage and Social Struggle in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 1994), 93–128, especially 112, 118.
 77. *Ibid.*, 127–28. Charles Forker seems to agree with Howard when he writes that cross-dressing in plays like *Twelfth Night* and *As You Like It*, present the “simultaneously amusing and threatening potential of homoeroticism.” Forker also argues that the “androgynous inclusiveness” in these plays satisfy rather than threaten the “emotional happiness” of the audience, and therefore provided good box office revenue. Forker, “Sexuality and Eroticism on the Renaissance Stage,” *South Central Review* 7.4 (1990):8–9, 16. Other scholarship on cross-dressed female heroines in early modern drama exercises one side or other of Howard's argument—that cross-dressed heroines embody either transgression or containment. For example, Catherine Belsey argues that cross-dressing in Shakespearean comedy allowed female characters to “escape the constraints and the vulnerability of the feminine.” Belsey suggests that cross-dressed heroines in these comedies disrupt the project to maintain “sexual difference” and provide a challenge to patriarchal authority. Belsey, “Disrupting Sexual Difference: Meaning and gender in the Comedies,” in *Alternative Shakespeares*, ed. John Drakakis (London: Methuen, 1985), 178–80. In contrast, Marjorie Garber argues that cross-dressed heroines performed a “recuperative” role in early modern drama. While they might challenge corrupt male authority, they always maintain their femininity. She contrasts what she sees as the “playful and liminal” cross-dressing of characters like Rosalind, Viola, Portia, Julia, and Imogen with the more threatening “masculinity” critics have found in characters like

- Goneril and Lady Macbeth. Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-dressing & Cultural Anxiety* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 72. By examining performance, Dymrna Callaghan argues that the presence of the boy actor negates the disruptive potential of the female body in these plays because "the male body . . . repeatedly and ritually enacts the displacement, exclusion, and discipline of its female counterpart." Callaghan, *Shakespeare Without Women: Representing Gender and Race on the Renaissance Stage* (London: Routledge, 2000), 32.
78. Stephen Orgel, *Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare's England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 106–26.
 79. Trubowitz reads *Hic Mulier* alongside treatises on motherhood and travel narratives and concludes that female cross-dressing was thought to undermine the nature of maternity at the heart of female subjectivity and therefore threatened the state and hopes of expansion. Trubowitz, "Cross-Dressed Women and Natural Mothers: 'Boundary Panic' in *Hic Mulier*," in *Debating Gender in Early Modern England, 1500–1700*, ed. Cristina Malcolmson and Mihoko Suzuki (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 185–206.
 80. Hotchkiss, *Clothes Make the Man*, 3–12.
 81. See Riche, *Farewell to Military Profession*, 74–80.
 82. Riche uses pronouns in a curious manner in this story. He continually refers to Silvio/Silla with male pronouns, even when the cross-dressed figure reveals herself to Julina, writing, "And herewithal, loosing his garments down to his stomach, and showed Julina his breasts and pretty teats surmounting far the whiteness of snow itself." *Ibid.*, 199.
 83. R. C., *The Troublesome and Hard Adventures*, N1v.
 84. *Ibid.*, O3r and P1r.
 85. Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources*, 63–78. I am grateful to Robert Maslen for the reference to this text.
 86. Thomas Lodge, *Rosalynde: Euphues' Golden Legacy*, ed. W. W. Greg (1590; London: Oxford University Press, 1931), 158–59.
 87. The origin and date of this song is unknown, though Ritson includes it in a group of ballads dating from the time of Edward VI, Mary, and Elizabeth. See Joseph Ritson, ed., *Ancient Songs and Ballads, from the Reign of King Henry the Second to the Revolution*, vol. 2 (London, 1829), 145–49. See also Francis James Child, ed., *English and Scottish Ballads*, vol. 4 (Boston, 1860), 174–79; and J. Woodfall Ebsworth, ed., *The Roxburghe Ballads*, vol. 6 (Hertford, England, 1889–1893), 567–70, who reprint the ballad with introductory material.
 88. Child, *English and Scottish Ballads*, 328.
 89. See Robert Bell, ed., *Early Ballads Illustrative of History, Traditions, and Customs; Also Ballads and Songs of the Peasantry of England* (London, 1877), 158.
 90. A number of later ballads do suggest the sexual possibilities endemic in the cross-dressed female character. For example, *The Scornful*

Damsels Overthrow tells the story of a young woman who rejects all her male suitors but falls deeply in love with and marries a “prity Maid” who disguises herself in male attire. However, the disguise was meant as a punishment for the damsel’s arrogance and the maid humiliates her by revealing herself at the wedding dinner. The dis-abused bride then stabs herself in “Despair.” See Hyder Edward Rollins, ed., *The Pepys Ballads*, vol. 3 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1930), 226–30. Rollins mentions several other ballads as well as contemporary newspaper accounts about women who marry other women. He compares *The Scornful Damsels Overthrow* with *Huon of Bordeaux* and Richard Brome’s play *A Madd Couple Well Matcht*. See also Dianne Dugaw, *Warrior Women and Popular Balladry; 1650–1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 143–62, who states, “Certainly, the ballads—like all forms that feature the transvestite heroine—enthusiastically exploit the homo-erotic implications of the gender disguising.”

91. William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure; With the Historie of Promos and Cassandra* (Philadelphia: Henry Altemus, n.d.), 5–11.
92. This occurs in part 1 of the play (3.7). See Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, 163. See also Freeburg, *Disguise Plots*, 62–3.
93. *Soliman and Perseda*, in *A Select Collection of Old English Plays*, ed. W. Carew Hazlitt, 4th ed. vol. 5 (London, 1874), 254. See also Freeburg, *Disguise Plots*, 66.
94. Aspatia uses a similar trick to effect her own death in *The Maid’s Tragedy* by Beaumont and Fletcher.
95. *Philotus*, *Miscellany Volume*, ed. A. J. Mill, The Scottish Text Society 3rd Ser. vol. 4 (Edinburgh: William Blackwood & Sons, 1933), 83–93. See also Freeburg, *Disguise Plots*, 62.
96. Thomas Heywood, *The Fair Maid of the West*, Parts I and II, ed. Robert K. Turner, Jr. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967). Quotations are from this edition. Turner agrees with other scholars that part I was written some time before 1603. See xi–xiii.
97. Jean Howard also believes that Bess is “a figure of crisis, . . . who continually evokes men’s fears of women’s power and sexuality” (109). However, as Howard herself argues, any threat Bess might pose is contained both by her devotion to Spencer and by the obviously more dangerous sexuality represented by Mullisheg and the Moors. Jean E. Howard, “An English Lass Amid the Moors: Gender, race, sexuality, and national identity in Heywood’s *The Fair Maid of the West*,” in *Women, “Race,” and Writing in the Early Modern Period*, ed. Margo Hendricks and Patricia Parker (New York: Routledge, 1994), 101–09.

2 PLAYFULLY EMERGENT LESBIAN EROTICS

1. Michael Shapiro, *Gender in Play*, 221–23. Constructions focuses on the female subject rather than the boy actor. As Michael Shapiro has

- argued with his theory of “dual consciousness,” at any given moment in a performance the early modern audience could be aware of the female character, even in male disguise, presented by a male actor. Female characters, even when presented by male actors, still maintained female subject positions that the audience acknowledged. Shapiro, *Gender in Play*, 7–8, 45–46.
2. Cross-dressing can also be a means to pursue a quick death, as in Beaumont and Fletcher’s *The Maid’s Tragedy*, or the anonymous *Soliman and Perseda*.
 3. Schwarz, *Tough Love*, 6.
 4. Howard, *The Stage and Social Struggle*, 94.
 5. Traub, “The Perversion of ‘Lesbian’ Desire,” 23–25.
 6. For the influence of Italian Renaissance drama on English drama see, e.g., Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources*; David Orr, *Italian Renaissance Drama in England Before 1625* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1970); and Michele Marrapodi, “From Narrative to Drama: The Erotic Tale and the Theatre,” in *The Italian World of English Renaissance Drama: Cultural Exchange and Intertextuality*, ed. Michele Marrapodi (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1998), 41–70.
 7. Some 150 of these Latin plays from Oxford and Cambridge survive. Written and performed by students, sometimes for royal visits, the plays span a variety of dramatic styles. The series Renaissance Latin Drama in England, edited by Marvin Spevack and J. W. Binns, has made many of these plays, some of which are accessible only in manuscript form, more readily available.
 8. For the source of *Labyrinthus* see Orr, *Italian Renaissance Drama*, 29–31 and Walter Hawkesworth, *Leander and Labyrinthus*, Renaissance Latin Drama in England Second Series 3 (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1987), 1. For the source of *Laelia* see Orr, *Italian Renaissance Drama*, 28; and *Hymenaeus, Abraham Fraunce Victoria, and Laelia*, Renaissance Latin Drama in England Second Series 13 (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1991), 14–16. *Laelia* was probably not directly translated from *Gl’ Ingannati*, but from a French translation of that work by Charles Estienne titled, in alternate editions, *Le Sacrifice* or *Les Abusez*. For the source material of *Twelfth Night* see Orr, *Italian Renaissance Drama*, 42 and Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources*, vol. 2, 269–372.
 9. This raises a question about the scope of female homoerotic imagery in continental plays and how English representations of female homoeroticism in early modern drama accord with those images.
 10. Walter Hawkesworth, *Walter Hawkesworth’s Labyrinthus: An Edition with Translation and Commentary*, ed. Susan Brock, vol. 1 (New York: Garland, 1988), 378, 344. Subsequent quotations are from this edition.

11. G. C. Moore Smith, *Laelia, A Comedy Acted at Queens' College, Cambridge Probably on March 1st, 1595* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910), 37. My thanks to Rachel Friedman and Rachel Kitzinger for translating this passage.
12. Thomas Middleton and William Rowley, *The Spanish Gipsie (As it was Acted [with great Applause] at the Privat House in Drury-Lane, and Salisbury Court)* (London, 1653).
13. Pretiosa's comment, of course, has multiple meanings. It refers specifically to her role as a gypsy street performer and references the boy actor's craft of personating many different characters, along with its homoerotic implications.
14. Michael Shapiro believes these lines express Constantia's own sexual excitement at being dressed in male apparel. Shapiro, *Gender in Play*, 166.
15. Lording Barry, *Ram-Alley or, Merry-Trickes. A Comedy. Divers times here-to-fore acted. By the Children of the Kings Revels* (London, 1636).
16. The bawdy exchange reflects the crude sexuality typical of the play's titular environment, as Ram Alley was a noted retreat for illicit behavior.
17. Beaumont, Francis and John Fletcher, *Comedies and Tragedies*.
18. Peter Hausted, *The Rivall Friends, A Comædie, As it was Acted befoe the King and Queens Majesties, when out of their princely favour they were pleased to visite their Universitie of Cambridge, upon the 19 day of March, 1631* (London, 1632). This play also includes a curious statement late in the action. The midwife, Placenta, has been helping Constantina, Isabella, and Pandora in their love intrigues. In 4.13, when Pandora is united with the now wealthy Endymion, Placenta demands a kiss from Pandora as her payment: "Pandora, kisse mee, girle, kisse mee I say, / I have deserved it, / 'twas my invention, / My plot this (girle) th'art happy wench, th'art happy" (sig. K3).
19. Shackerley Marmion, *The Antiquary. A Comedy, Acted by Her Majesties Servants at the Cock-Pit* (London, 1641). Subsequent quotations are from this edition.
20. Karen L. Raber describes Lady Orphant as an exemplary woman, a character type that Cavendish used to assert the value of female independence. See Raber, "Warrior Women in the Plays of Cavendish and Killigrew," *SEL* 40.3 (Summer 2000):426.
21. Cavendish, *Plays*.
22. *Clyomon and Clamydes*, The Malone Society Reprints (1599; London: Oxford University Press, 1913), v. See also Freeburg, *Disguise Plots*, 63; A. R. Braunmuller and Michael Hattaway, eds, *The Cambridge Companion to English Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 422; and Shapiro, *Gender in Play*, 221 who dates performance from 1570 to 83.

23. *Clyomon and Clamydes: A Critical Edition*, ed. Betty J. Littleton (The Hague: Mouton, 1968), 34.
24. Traub, *Desire and Anxiety*, 130.
25. William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night* in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), 403–42. Subsequent quotations are from this edition.
26. Shapiro, *Gender in Play*, 151–54.
27. Ibid., 162 and DiGangi, *Homeroitics*, 41.
28. The *Oxford English Dictionary* includes the following in its reference for wonderful: “1596 J. SMYTHE in Lett. Lit. Men (Camden) 91 Whereof ensued unto me . . . a wonderfull payne in my stomacke.” Smythe uses “wonderfull” to identify an unusual or extraordinary feeling of discomfort. The phrase “wonderfull payne,” rather than an oxymoron, is a diffinitive statement of anguish and distress. Wonderful can have connotations of “good” or “pleasing” but that is not its sole meaning, it also refers to the startling, the strange, the prodigious, and disturbing. It identifies wonder, amazement, or astonishment. See *Oxford English Dictionary* (London: Oxford University Press, 1993).
29. DiGangi, *Homeroitics*, 59. See also Traub, *Desire & Anxiety*, 124.
30. Traub, *Desire & Anxiety*, 125.
31. Robert Greene, *The Scottish History of James the Fourth*, ed. Norman Sanders, *The Revels Plays* (London: Methuen, 1970), xxv–xxix. See also Freeburg, *Disguise Plots*, 67 and Shapiro, *Gender in Play*, 221, who dates the first performance as 1590.
32. Ruth Hudson, “Greene’s *James IV* and Contemporary Allusions to Scotland,” *PMLA* 47.3 (1932):663 and C. Lekhal, “The Historical Background of Robert Greene’s *The Scottish History of James IV*, or ‘Cross the Foe Before He Have Betrayed You,’” *Cahiers Elisabethains* 35 (1988):27.
33. The multifaceted political implications of Shakespearean drama and performance are explored in a variety of texts. See Louis Montrose, *The Purpose of Playing: Shakespeare and the Cultural Politics of the Elizabethan Theatre* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Stanford M. Lyman and Marvin B. Scott, *The Drama of Social Reality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975); Karen Hermassi, *Polity and Theatre in Historical Perspective* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1977); Alexander Leggatt, *Shakespeare’s Political Drama: The History Plays and the Roman Plays* (London: Routledge, 1988); and Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, eds, *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985). Texts like J. Ellen Gainor’s *Imperialism and Theatre* demonstrate that cultures used drama to further the dominant ideology of imperialist or colonial activity throughout history. J. Ellen Gainor, ed., *Imperialism and Theatre: Essays on World Theatre, Drama and Performance*

- 1795–1995 (London: Routledge, 1995). See also *Renaissance Drama: Renaissance Drama in an Age of Colonization*. New Series 23 (1992). Greene's political project in James IV, then, is not unusual for its historical context. The English maintained a decidedly negative view of the Scots, no doubt stemming from the quasi-colonial relationship England historically maintained over Scotland. G. W. S. Barrow, *The Anglo-Norman Era in Scottish History* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980); Robert Bartlett, *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization and Cultural Change, 950–1350* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 78–82; Thomas I. Rae, *Scotland in the Time of Shakespeare* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1965), 1–3.
34. Greene, *James IV*, 93. Subsequent quotations are from this edition.
 35. *Ibid.*, 139.
 36. See Henk Gras, *Studies in Elizabethan Audience Response to the Theatre: Part 2* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1993), 54–55.
 37. *Ibid.*, 54.
 38. The play was originally printed separately in 1638, but was collected with Cowley's other works in 1681 and appeared in numerous editions through the eighteenth century. Harbage believes the play was unacted, but as Cowley was a scholar in Westminster School when he wrote it, the play might have been performed there. Alfred Harbage, *Annals of English Drama*, Revised S. Schoenbaum (London: Methuen, 1964), 128–29. The title page of the play declares, "Written, At the time of his being Kings Scholler in Westminster Schoole, by A. Cowley."
 39. Abraham Cowley, *Love's Riddle. A Pastorall Comedie* (London, 1638). Subsequent quotations are from this edition.
 40. Susan Bennett, *Theatre Audiences; A Theory of Production and Reception*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 1997), 69–71.
 41. *Ibid.*, 70.
 42. Cross-dressed heroines might have suggested their sexual identities somehow during early action in a play.
 43. Thomas Middleton, *Anything for a Quiet Life. A Comedy, formerly Acted at Black-Fryers, by His late Majesties Servants. Never before Printed* (London, 1662). Subsequent quotations are from this edition.
 44. Middleton, Thomas, Ben Jonson, and John Fletcher, *The Widdow, A Comedie. As it was Acted at the private House in Black-Fryers, with great Applause, by His late Majesties Servents* (London, 1652). Subsequent quotations are from this edition.
 45. Leslie Thomson, "Making a Woman of the Boy: The Characterization of Women in Middleton's Plays," in *The Elizabethan Theatre XIV*, ed. A. L. Magnusson and C. E. McGee (Toronto: P. D. Meany, 1996), 162–63.
 46. Thomas Middleton, *No Wit, No Help Like a Woman's*, ed. Lowell E. Johnson, Regents Renaissance Drama Series (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1976), 44. Subsequent quotations are from this edition.

47. Susan Zimmerman, "Disruptive desire: Artifice and indeterminacy in Jacobean comedy," in *Erotic Politics: Desire on the Renaissance Stage*, ed. Susan Zimmerman (New York: Routledge, 1992), 48.
48. Ibid., 55.
49. One editor determines that Kate does kiss Goldenfleece at this moment. At 2.3.159, Lowell E. Johnson, editor of the Regents Renaissance Drama Series edition, includes the direction "[Kisses her]" at the end of Kate's line. That stage direction, however, is absent from the original printed version of the play. Thomas Middleton, *No Wit, No Help Like a Womans. A Comedy by Tho. Middleton, Gent.* (London, 1657), sig. D7.
50. Middleton's reference to Pietro Aretino in this particular context is very striking. Goldenfleece is eager to sleep with the disguised Kate. The text has focused on her growing sexual excitement and choice of partner. But are the "loose Aretine flames" general sexual license or are they specifically a reference to the female-female sexual encounters in the *Ragionamenti*?
51. See also Kenneth Muir, "Two Plays Reconsidered: *More Dissemblers Besides Women* and *No Wit, No Help Like a Woman's*," in "Accompaning the players," *Essays Celebrating Thomas Middleton, 1580-1980*, ed. Kenneth Friedenrich (New York: AMS Press, 1983), 157.
52. DiGangi, *Homoerotics*, 98.
53. Shirley should have been a courtier playwright, but instead of succeeding Jonson, he followed Fletcher as the most popular dramatist of his generation. He also bridged the Renaissance and Restoration by introducing dramatic elements that would become standard in comedy of manners. See Alfred Harbage, *Cavalier Drama: An Historical and Critical Supplement to the Study of the Elizabethan and Restoration Stage* (New York: MLA, 1936), 162-63.
54. Dale B. J. Randall, *Winter Fruit: English Drama 1642-1660* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1995), 293.
55. For a discussion of this aspect of the plot, see Rosemary Gaby, "Of Vagabonds and Commonwealths: *Beggars' Bush*, *A Jovial Crew*, and *The Sisters*," *SEL* 34 (1994): 417.
56. James Shirley, *The Sisters, a comedie, as it was acted at the private house in Black-Fryers, written by James Shirley never printed before* (London, 1652). Subsequent quotations are from this edition.
57. By the time of Pulcheria's revelation, Angellina may have been let in on her deception; however, the lines are unclear. Angellina's interest in the Prince is also unknown and she becomes his bride out of convention rather than careful plotting.
58. See Martin Butler, *Theatre and Crisis 1632-1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 263.
59. See Steen H. Spove, *A Critical Old-Spelling Edition of Richard Brome's A Mad Couple Well Match'd* (New York: Garland, 1979), iv;

- and John S. Nania, "Richard Brome" in *Jacobean and Caroline Dramatists*, ed. Fredson Bowers, DLB 58 (Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1987), 27.
60. Richard Brome, *Five New Playes, (Viz.) The Madd Couple well matcht, The Novella, The Court Begger, The City Witt, The Damoiselle* (London, 1653). Subsequent quotations are from this edition.
 61. Spove, *Mad Couple*, xvii–xxii. Shapiro (*Gender in Play*, 168) also believes the audience was aware of Amie's identity.
 62. For a discussion of widows as characters in early modern drama see Ira Clark, "The Widow Hunt on the Tudor-Stuart Stage," *SEL* 41.2 (2001):399–416. Twentieth-century critics have been disturbed by the match between Crostill and Carelesse, seeing it as Brome's implicit acceptance of immorality. The play evinces a "coarseness and vulgarity" by allowing Carelesse, who attempts to seduce his aunt and threatens her with blackmail, to marry the wealthy Crostill without demonstrating remorse for his behaviors. Quoted in Catherine M. Shaw, *Richard Brome* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980), 90–92.
 63. Catherine Shaw explains that the Thrivewells and Salewares "are designed to expose the flaws of the aristocratic fetish for Platonic non-jealousy," which was "a favorite target for Bromeian satire." Shaw, *Richard Brome*, 88.

3 ANXIOUSLY EMERGENT LESBIAN EROTICS

1. Jonathan Goldberg, *Sodometries: Renaissance Texts, Modern Sexualities* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992), 142–43.
2. See also Denise A. Walen, "Constructions of Female Homoerotics in Early Modern Drama," *Theatre Journal* 54.3 (2002):411–30.
3. Bruce R. Smith, "Making a Difference: Male/Male 'desire' in tragedy, comedy, and tragi-comedy," in *Erotic Politics: Desire on the Renaissance Stage*, ed. Susan Zimmerman (London: Routledge, 1992), 145–46.
4. Valerie Traub, "The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern Drama," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 7.2 (2001): 260–61.
5. R. A. Foakes, "Tragicomedy and Comic Form," in *Comedy from Shakespeare to Sheridan: Change and Continuity in the English and European Dramatic Tradition*, ed. A. R. Braunmuller and J. C. Bulman (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1986), 82.
6. Verna A. Foster, "Sex Averted or Converted: Sexuality and Tragicomic Genre in the Plays of Fletcher," *SEL* 32(1992):311–12.
7. Smith, "Making a Difference," 142.
8. Foakes, "Tragicomedy and Comic Form," 82.
9. Lee Bliss, "Pastiche, Burlesque, Tragicomedy," in *The Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Drama*, ed. A. R. Braunmuller and Michael Hattaway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 238–39.

10. Shapiro, *Gender in Play*, 187–98.
11. Beaumont, Francis, and John Fletcher, *Philaster; or, Love lies a Bleeding. As it hath beene diverse times Acted, at the Globe, and Blacke-Friers, by his Majesties Servants* (London, 1622).
12. Samuel Daniel, *Hymen's Triumph*, ed. John Pitcher, The Malone Society Reprints (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) v–x. Pitcher believes that the play was not specifically commissioned for the Roxborough wedding.
13. *Ibid.*, 69. Subsequent quotations are from this edition, unless otherwise noted.
14. Certain scholars have questioned the normativity of seemingly conventional marriage endings in early modern drama. See Lisa Hopkins [*The Shakespearean Marriage: Merry Wives and Heavy Husbands* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 16–17] who argues that while Shakespeare's comedies end with marriages, or the promise of marriage, he disappoints expectations or troubles assumptions about the celebratory aspect of such unions. Julie Crawford ["The Homoerotics of Shakespeare's Elizabethan Comedies," in *A Companion to Shakespeare's Works*, ed. Richard Dutton and Jean E. Howard (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2003) 3:137–58] argues that marriage does not negate or terminate female homoeroticism, but merely reorients it in domestic contexts. See also DiGangi, *Homoerotics*, 62 and Schwarz, *Tough Love*, 238.
15. Although the edited manuscript does not contain the word "instinct," it appears in the early printed copies of the play. See Samuel Daniel, *Hymens Triumph. A Pastorall Tragicomædie. Presented at the Queenes Court in the Strand, at her Majesties magnificent entertainment of the Kings most excellent Majesty, being at the Nuptials of the Lord Roxborough in Samuel Daniel, The Whole Workes of Samuel Daniel esquire in Poetrie* (London, 1623), sig. i16v.
16. Surprisingly, the play does not pair Phillis with Montanus at the end. Unlike Phebe in *As You Like It*, Olivia in *Twelfth Night*, or Lady Goldenfleece in *No Wit, No Help Like a Woman's*, Phillis is not disposed of to a convenient male, even though the Arcadians embrace Montanus despite his violent transgressions. Phillis might be categorized among the "queerest of Theodora Jankowski's virgins—women who refuse to marry." See Jankowski, *Pure Resistance*, 28, 170–93.
17. Paul A. Cantor, "John Ford," in *Jacobean and Caroline Dramatists*, ed. Fredson Bowers, Dictionary of Literary Biography 58 (Detroit: Gale Research, 1987), 95.
18. S. Blaine Ewing, *Burtonian Melancholy in the Plays of John Ford* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1940), 32–46.
19. Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, vol. 6, *Commentary on the Third Partition*, ed. J. B. Bamforth with Martin Dodsworth

- (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 33–34. Burton references the ambassadorial letters of Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq first published in Latin in 1589.
20. Cantor, "John Ford," 92.
 21. Critics have seen this play as a kind of pastiche of earlier dramas, including *Philaster*, *King Lear*, and of course *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*. See Cantor, "John Ford," 96, R. F. Hill, introduction to *The Lover's Melancholy*, by John Ford, Revels Plays (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), 9–10, Robert B. Heilman, "The Perverse: An Aspect of Ford's Art" in *Concord in Discord: The Plays of John Ford, 1586–1986*, ed. Donald K. Anderson (New York: AMS, 1986), 45n; and H. J. Oliver, *The Problem of John Ford* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1955), 52–55.
 22. Heilman, "The Perverse," 29.
 23. John Ford, *'Tis Pity She's a Whore and Other Plays*, ed. Marion Lomax, Oxford Drama Library (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 42. Subsequent quotations are from this edition.
 24. Juliet McMaster argues that the Eroclea/Thamasta relationship makes up the secondary plot of Ford's three level play, with the main plot involving Eroclea and Palador and the tertiary plot a low comic escapade concerning Cuculus. The secondary plot then, while not as solemn as the main action, is still serious and focuses, as McMaster says is common, on sexual appetite. Juliet McMaster, "Love, Lust, and Sham: Structural Pattern in the Plays of John Ford," *Renaissance Drama* 2 (1969):158–59, 163–64. Ford juxtaposes a scene with Cuculus just before the encounter between Eroclea and Thamasta, thus heightening its serious tone by contrast. This secondary plot has also been cited as the most dramatically intense action of Ford's play, which McMaster again says, is typical. Hill, introduction to *The Lover's Melancholy*, 16–19, McMaster, "Love, Lust, and Sham," 158. In contrast, Larry Champion does find the exchange between Eroclea and Thamasta comic. Larry S. Champion, " 'Factions of Distempered Passions': The Development of John Ford's Tragic Vision in *The Witch of Edmonton* and *The Lover's Melancholy*" in *Concord in Discord: The Plays of John Ford, 1586–1986*, ed. Donald K. Anderson (New York: AMS, 1986), 123.
 25. Mark Stavig, in his early analysis of Ford's work, referred to Thamasta's passion as a "heroical love," and argued that since it was directed toward a disguised woman it represented not "the attraction of bodies but the vivid imagination of diseased minds." Stavig, *John Ford and the Traditional Moral Order* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968), 79–80.
 26. Oliver, *Problem of John Ford*, 54–55.
 27. Ford, *'Tis Pity*, x–xi, Oliver, *Problem of John Ford*, 55, and Heilman, "The Perverse," 30.

28. James Bulman, "Caroline Drama," in *The Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Drama*, ed. A. R. Braunmuller and Michael Hattaway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 362.
29. Harbage, *Annals*, 138–39.
30. Shirley also plays comically upon male homoeroticism for he has the Captain, the play's low comic character, overhear a soliloquy by Rosania expressing her love for Ferdinand and her anger at his marriage. Since Rosania is disguised as Tiberio and her sexual identity is unknown to the play's other characters, the Captain reacts with surprise, until he realizes that Rosania is indeed a woman.
31. Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian*, 72–73. Castle maintains that such counterplotting does not exist in literature earlier than the twentieth century and cites Sylvia Townsend Warner's novel *Summer Will Show* as one of the earliest and more perfect examples of the model.
32. James Shirley, *Six New Playes*, viz, *The Brothers*, *The Sisters*, *The Doubtfull Heir*, *The Imposture*, *The Cardinall*, *The Court Secret* (London, 1653), sig. D2v. Subsequent quotations are from this edition.
33. The language at the beginning of this scene also echoes the "pilgrims" love scene when Romeo and Juliet first meet. In both plays, a lover argues his or her way from holding hands to kissing the beloved.
34. Celia Daileader, *Eroticism on the Renaissance Stage: Transcendence, Desire, and the Limits of the Visible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 1–5, 51.
35. Sir John Suckling, *The Works of Sir John Suckling: The Plays*, ed. L. A. Beaurline (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 184, 289–94; Harbage, *Cavalier Drama*, 115.
36. Brennoralt is the play's political conscience, not its romantic hero, and his scenes present Suckling's own view of a loyal but discontented courtier near the end of Charles I's reign. Harbage, *Cavalier Drama*, 112–15, 176–77; Butler, *Theatre and Crisis*, 76–79.
37. Suckling, *Works*, 289. See also Harbage, *Cavalier Drama*, 112; Butler, *Theatre and Crisis*, 76–79; and Charles L. Squier, "Sir John Suckling" in *Jacobean and Caroline Dramatists*, ed. Fredson Bowers, DLB 58 (Detroit: Gale Research, 1987), 274.
38. This is one of several plays not included in Michael Shapiro's study of the female page, although it uses the convention of a cross-dressed female heroine. The other title's are Lodowick Carlell's *The Passionate Lovers* and Abraham Cowley's *Love's Riddle*. See Shapiro, *Gender in Play*, 221–23.
39. John Franceschina discusses the relationship between Iphigene and Almerin, but misrepresents the reason for Iphigene's seduction of Francelia. He also acknowledges, although only in a footnote, the female homoerotic potential between Iphigene and Francelia. John Franceschina, *Homosexualities in the English Theatre: From Lyly to Wilde* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997), 101–02, 108n.

40. See DiGangi, *Homoerotics*, 92–99.
41. Suckling, *Works*, 209. Subsequent quotations are from this edition.
42. At the end of act 4.4, Francelia agreed that Iphigene could visit her in her bedchamber later that night. The plot moves chronologically until we next see them together in the opening of act 5.3 in Francelia's bedchamber the following morning.
43. See the discussion in chapter 4.
44. The ending of *Philaster* also rejects the conventional ending when Philaster marries Arathusa, and Euphrasia becomes her waiting-woman.
45. Nabil Matar, *Islam in Britain 1558–1685* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 18–19, 54–58; Daniel J. Vitkus, ed., *Three Turk Plays from Early Modern England* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 1–16; Barbara Fuchs, "Faithless Empires: Pirates, Renegadoes, and the English Nation" *ELH* 67.1 (2000):45, 51–52.
46. Vitkus, *Three Turk Plays*, 14.
47. Robert Daborne, *A Christian Turn'd Turke: or, the Tragicall Lives and Deaths of the two Famous Pyrates, Ward and Dansiker* (London, 1612). Subsequent quotations are from this edition.
48. Harbage, *Annals*, 154–55.
49. Randall, *Winter Fruit*, 135–39.
50. Leonard Willan, *Orgula: or, the Fatall Error. A Tragedy Composed by L.W. Whereunto, Is Annexed a Preface, discovering the true Nature of Poesie, with the proper Use and Intention of such publique Divertissements* (London, 1658). Subsequent quotations are from this edition.
51. Randall, *Winter Fruit*, 135.
52. As with many cross-dressed plays, the personal pronouns of the stage directions reflect the disguise rather than the character.
53. For discussions of homosexuality in popular cinema see Vito Russo, *The Celluloid Closet, Homosexuality in the Movies*, rev. edn (San Bernardino: Borgo Press, 1987).

4 PREDATORY LESBIAN EROTICS

1. Bruster, "Female–Female Eroticism," 1.
2. *Ibid.*, 2.
3. *Ibid.*, 17.
4. Catharine Stimpson sees this as a moment not of nascent or repressed homoeroticism but as an instance of "sublimated incest." It seems, in fact, both. Tamora enjoys the pleasure her sons gain from the rape and relishes the sexual control she commands over Lavinia through them. See Catharine R. Stimpson, "Shakespeare and the Soil of Rape," in *The Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*, ed. Carolyn Ruth Swift Lenz, Gayle Greene, and Carol Thomas Neely (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1980), 60.
5. In her article, "'I'll Want My Will Else': *The Changeling* and Women's Complicity With Their Rapists" [*ELH* 62.4 (1995): 759–90],

Deborah G. Burks analyzes Beatrice-Joanna as the epitome of female moral weakness in a patriarchal society obsessed with women's vulnerability to seduction. Extending Burks theory, Diaphanta becomes one more victim to Beatrice-Joanna's sexual immorality, just as Alizia and Fidelia become sacrifices to Voada and Orgula's lusts in *A Christian Turn'd Turke* and *Orgula*, respectively.

6. [John Dymock], *Il Pastor Fido: or The Faithfull Shepheard. Translated out of Italian into English* (London, 1602). Subsequent quotations are from this edition. The text opens with three dedications to Sir Edward Dymock as the translator's kinsman; therefore, scholars ascribe the play to John Dymock.
7. Although Suckling's Iphigene seduces Francelia for her own gain, she is saved from the stigma of the sexual predator owing to her deep regard for Francelia and fatal love for Almerin. The text even excuses her cross-dressing as an imposed necessity undertaken by her mother to save the child from her father's rash oath to disown a baby girl.
8. Although her collection was published two years after 1660, the terminal date of this study, the plays Cavendish included were written during the civil war and fall within the study's parameters. Harbage dates them between 1653 and 1662. Her second volume of plays, printed in 1668, were written after the publication of the first volume and are not considered here. See Harbage, *Annals*, 152–53, 162–63.
9. This drama stands in stark contrast to Cavendish's later and more considered *Convent of Pleasure*, a work whose utopian female community encourages readings of homoerotic affection in the context of a romantic comedy. For Theodora Jankowski, "*The Convent of Pleasure* is a text that imagines ways in which queer virgins can resist patriarchal society militantly, economically, and/or erotically," and she identifies homoerotic desires in Lady Happy's affection for the Princess. See Jankowski, "Pure Resistance: Queer(y)ing Virginity in William Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* and Margaret Cavendish's *The Convent of Pleasure*," *Shakespeare Studies* 26 (1998):233–41. In another study, Irene Dash reports that her students detected a "lesbian community" in the play. Dash, "Single-Sex Retreats in Two Early Modern Dramas: *Love's Labor's Lost* and *The Convent of Pleasure*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 47 (1996):389. See also Misty Anderson who argues that same-sex "amatory partnerships" in the play materialize from the erotic playfulness of cross-dressing. Anderson, "Tactile Places: Materializing Desire in Margaret Cavendish and Jane Barker," *Textual Practice* 13.2 (1999):337–39. Finally, Emma Donoghue thinks the play is noteworthy both for its explicit eroticism and for its positive depiction of a secular female community. Donoghue, *Passions Between Women*, 226–32.
10. Cavendish, *Plays*. Subsequent quotations are from this edition.
11. Bruster, "Female-Female Eroticism," 18.

12. E. J. Burford, *Bawds and Lodgings: A History of the London Bankside Brothels c. 100–1675* (London: Peter Owen, 1976), 96–97.
13. Prostitutes did service female clients for in 1482 the courts charged a Florentine prostitute for attending a group of female customers. See Patricia Simons, “Lesbian (In)Visibility in Italian Renaissance Culture: Diana and Other Cases of *donna con donna*,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 27.1/2 (1994):89. Simons’s article reads visual representations of female homoeroticism in Italian Renaissance paintings, especially images of the goddess Diana, and she argues that the relative invisibility of female homosexuality in legal or medical documents allowed painters to explore female same-sex desire without condemnation.
14. While the title page does not credit a translator, Harbage attributes the play to James Mabbe. See Harbage, *Annals*, 126–27.
15. [James Mabbe,] *The Spanish Bawd Represented in Celestina: or The Tragick-Comedy of Calisto and Melibea. Wherein is contained, besides the pleasantnesse and sweetnesse of the stile, many Philosophicall Sentences, and profitable Instructions necessary for the younger sort: Shewing the deceits and subtilties housed in the bosomes of false servants, and Cunny-catching Bawds* (London, 1631). Subsequent quotations are from this edition.
16. Edward Jorden, *A Disease Called the Suffocation of the Mother*, London 1603, *The English Experience* 392 (Amsterdam: Da Capo Press, 1971). I am grateful to Gail Kern Paster for introducing this text to me.
17. Spenser includes a similar episode between Britomart and Glauce in *The Faerie Queene*. Maternal comfort seems to give way to erotic contact when Glauce attempts to alleviate Britomart’s sexual agitation over her imagined knight:

So hauing sayd, her twixt her armes twaine
 Shee streightly straynd [tightly clasped], and colled
 [embraced] tenderly,
 And euery trembling ioynt, and euery vaine
 Shee softly felt, and rubbed busily (3.2.34.1–4)

Glauce also kisses Britomart’s “alabaster brest” and “bathe[s]” Britomart’s “eies with kisses deare” (3.2.42.7, 34.6–7). While the interlude contains none of the treachery found in *The Spanish Bawd*, both texts construct scenarios in which older women use erotic physical contact ostensibly to pacify psychosexual anxieties in younger women. See Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*.

18. Gregory S. Hutcheson, “Leonor López de Córdoba and the Configuration of Female–Female Desire,” in *Same Sex Love and Desire Among Women in the Middle Ages*, ed. Francesca Canadé Sautman and Pamela Sheingorn (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 252.
19. J[ohn] Rickets, *Byrsa Basilia; A Latin Academic comedy of the Early Seventeenth Century* by J. Rickets, ed. and trans. R. H. Bowers,

- Materials for the Study of the Old English Drama, New Series, vol. 17 (Louvain: Louvain Librairie Universitaire, 1939), 120.
20. James Shirley, *The Bird in a Cage. A Comedie. As it hath beene Presented at the Phoenix in Drury-Lane. The Author James Shirley, Servant to Her Majesty* (London, 1633). Subsequent quotations are from this edition.
 21. Valerie Traub reads the play as a rebuttal to William Prynne and argues that Donella's play acting transports her with desire to the point that she would have raped Eugenia if she had not been interrupted. I agree, but I am mostly interested in the way Shirley manages to effect a homoerotic scenario of rape and construct several minutes of unrestrained physical intimacy between two female characters. See Traub, *Renaissance of Lesbianism*, 176–77.
 22. Thomas Heywood, *The Golden Age: or, The lives of Jupiter and Saturne, with the defining of the Heathen Gods. As it hath beene sundry times acted at the Red Bull, by the Queenes Majesties Servants* (London, 1611).
 23. Traub argued that Shirley and Heywood, along with Shakespeare, manufactured erotic situations between women only to supplant them with heterosexual relationships, establishing the transference of homoerotic affections to heterosexual romance as a "natural" progression of desire. This shift, Traub argues, while not effacing homoerotic desire, endorses the superiority of heterosexuality. See Traub, "(in)significance," 163.
 24. Harbage calls the play "a triumph of absurdity." See Harbage, *Cavalier Drama*, 179.
 25. [H. B.], *The Female Rebellion A Tragicomedy From a MS. in the Hunterian Museum University of Glasgow Printed for Private Circulation* (n.p.: 1872), 44. Subsequent quotations are from this edition.
 26. Elizabeth Howe, *The First English Actresses: Women and Drama 1660–1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 148.
 27. Harbage discusses both Davenant's "audacity" in producing theatrical productions during the ban and the importance of the play to heroic drama. See Harbage, *Cavalier Drama*, 211–12, 48–50.
 28. William Davenant, *Sir William Davenant The Siege of Rhodes, A Critical Edition*, ed. Ann-Mari Hedbäck, Series Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis Studia Anglistica Upsaliensia 14 (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1973), 83. Subsequent quotations are from this edition.
 29. Traub, *Desire and Anxiety*, 124, 131.
 30. In the case of Lucar, however, commerce trumps doctrine. In time, she and Conscience reemerge from their respective confinements, owing to the popularity of the original text, in a sequel written by Wilson, *The Three Lords and Three Ladies of London*.
 31. Lucar and Celestina have much in common with the characters Bruster discusses who coerce female characters into heterosexual sex. See Bruster, "Female–Female Eroticism," 16–25.

5 UTOPIAN LESBIAN EROTICS

1. Henry Bellamy, *Iphis: Text, Translation, Notes*, ed. Jay M. Freyman, William E. Mahaney, Walter K. Sherwin, Salzburg Studies in English Literature, Elizabethan and Renaissance Studies 107:1 (Salzburg: Institut Für Anglistik und Amerikanistik Universität Salzburg, 1986), 1–8.
2. Ibid., 97. Subsequent quotations are from this edition.
3. Valerie Traub “(in)significance,” 157–58 and *Renaissance of Lesbianism*, 158–87.
4. Traub, “Renaissance of Lesbianism,” 257–58.
5. Bruster, “Female–Female Eroticism,” 11.
6. Ibid., 7–13.
7. Theodora Jankowski, “. . . in the Lesbian Void: Woman–Woman Eroticism in Shakespeare’s Plays,” in *A Feminist Companion to Shakespeare*, ed. Dymna Callaghan (London: Blackwell, 2000), 308.
8. Shakespeare, *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 374. Subsequent quotations from Shakespeare are from this edition.
9. Richard Mallette, “Same-Sex Erotic Friendship in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*,” *Renaissance Drama* 26 (1995):30.
10. Laurie J. Shannon, “Emilia’s Argument: Friendship and ‘Human Title’ in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*,” *ELH* 64.3 (1997):661.
11. Shakespeare, *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 1648. Subsequent quotations are from this edition. Jeffrey Masten offers two readings of this line during his careful analysis of male friendship between Arcite and Palamon. While he agrees that Emilia seems to prefer the love between women to heterosexual romance, he argues that the text positions her back within a patriarchal structure. He also argues that discursive similarities of male friendship exist in the relationship between Emilia and Flavina, but that the latter’s absence from the play negates the couple. See Masten, *Textual Intercourse: Collaboration, Authorship, and Sexualities in Renaissance Drama*, Cambridge Studies in Renaissance Literature and Culture 14 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 50–52.
12. Richard Abrams, “Gender Confusion and Sexual Politics in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*,” in *Drama, Sex and Politics*, ed. James Redmond (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 69–70.
13. The successive translations and adaptations of Guarini’s *Il Pastor Fido* demonstrate its popularity. The first adaptation appeared between 1590 and 1605 in an anonymous Latin pastoral written at Cambridge. Then in 1601 Dymock translated the text. In 1630 Jonathan Sidnam wrote another translation, followed by a third from Kenelm Digby in 1635, and another by Richard Fanshawe in 1647. See Harbage, *Annals*, 88–89, 78–79, 126–27, 132–33, 144–45.
14. [Dymock], *Il Pastor Fido*. Subsequent quotations are from this edition. On the van Dyck painting see, Arthur K. Wheelock, Jr.,

- Susan Barnes, and Julius S. Held, *Anthony van Dyck* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1990), 239–42.
15. Traub, “(in)significance,” 159–61.
 16. Heywood, *The Golden Age*. Subsequent quotations are from this edition.
 17. These plays also introduce a new genre within this study: the romance narrative, which Annabel Patterson argues allowed writers to avoid censorship of their political views. She maintains that early modern culture accepted certain conventions for encoding politically subversive ideas in literature. Perhaps classical romance also provided a form in which writers could present sexually transgressive ideas without critique. Patterson, *Censorship and Interpretation: The Conditions of Writing and Reading in Early Modern England* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 11, 24–43.
 18. Michael Andrews believes the author of this work had a copy of Sidney’s *Arcadia* open before him as he wrote the play. See Michael Cameron Andrews, “Sidney’s *Arcadia* on the English Stage: A Study of the Dramatic Adaptations of *The Countess of Pembroke’s Arcadia*” (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1966), 182–83.
 19. *Love’s Changelinges Change*, ed. John P. Cutts (Fennimore: Wisconsin: John Westburg Associates, 1974).
 20. Andrews, “Sidney’s *Arcadia* on the English Stage,” 111–23.
 21. James Shirley, *A Pastorall Called the Arcadia. Acted by her Majesties Servants at the Phoenix in Drury Lane. Written by James Shirly, Gent* (London, 1640). Subsequent quotations are from this edition.
 22. John Day, *The Ile of Guls. As it hath been often playd in the blacke Fryars, by the Children of the Revels. Written by John Day* (London, 1606).
 23. Louise K. Horowitz, *Honoré d’Urfé*, TWAS 698 (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1984), 103–08, 111–25.
 24. Leonard Willan, *Astræa; or, True Love’s Myrrour. A Pastoral* (London, 1651). Subsequent quotations are from this edition.
 25. The first half of this scene appears in the first part of *L’Astrée*, Book 5, but after Lycidas stalks off angrily, followed by Phyllis, there is no corresponding exchange between Astrea and Diana. See Steven Rendall, *Astræa, Part One*, Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies 134 (Binghamton, NY: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, 1995), 123.
 26. The other plays to use a male cross-dressing convention originate from prominent source material that uses male-to-female disguise. They are the various *Arcadia* plots—Day’s *The Isle of Guls*, Shirley’s *The Arcadia*, and the anonymous *Love’s Changelinges Change*—Willan’s *Astræa*, and the Callisto/Jupiter myth from Heywood’s *The Golden Age*.
 27. Suggestions of the character’s true sex come from representations of his masculinity, both physical (described by others) and psychological (he displays courage rather than feminine distress against the advancing Tartars). However, even his own brother does not recognize

- Archas in the opening scene of the play, nor does his father later in act 1, commenting only that this Alinda looks like his dead wife. Old Archas never even mentions the existence of this second male child until the moment when young Archas discovers himself.
28. Beaumont, Francis and John Fletcher, *Comedies and Tragedies*. Subsequent quotations are from this edition.
 29. Beaumont, Francis, and John Fletcher, *The Works in the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon*, ed. Fredson Bowers, vol. 6 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 113–19.
 30. Beaumont, and Fletcher, *Comedies and Tragedies*. Subsequent quotations are from this edition.
 31. John Lyly, *Gallathea and Midas*, ed. Anne Begor Lancashire (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1969), xvi–xvii. Jeff Shulman writes that Lyly used Ovid's *Metamorphosis* as the source material for several of his plays. See Jeff Shulman, "Ovidian Myth in Lyly's Courtship Comedies," *Studies in English Literature* 25 (1985):250, 261. Violet M. Jeffrey believes that Italian drama inspired Lyly with the idea of two girls falling in love. Jeffrey, *John Lyly and the Italian Renaissance* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1969), 83.
 32. This work is an Elizabethan "three-level" play. Besides the main plot and a well-coordinated subplot, a third plot involves typically clownish character types. See Robert J. Meyer, "'Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue': The Mystery of Love in Lyly's *Gallathea*," *Studies in English Literature* 21.2 (1981):193–208. See also Leah Scragg, "Shakespeare, Lyly and Ovid: The Influence of *Gallathea* on *A Midsummer Night's Dream*," *Shakespeare Survey* 30 (1977):127–30.
 33. Robert Y. Turner, "Some Dialogues of Love in Lyly's Comedies," *English Literary History* 29 (1962):276–88. Discussing the dialogic qualities of several Lyly plays, Turner explains that "unfavorable circumstances" prevent the women from revealing their love and makes their flirtations tentative and indirect.
 34. John Lyly, *Gallathea. As it was playde before the Quenes Majestie at Greene-wiche, on Newyeeres day at Night. By the Chyldren of Paules* (London, 1592). Subsequent quotations are from this edition.
 35. Laurie Shannon, "Nature's Bias: Renaissance Homonormativity and Elizabethan Comic Likeness," *Modern Philology* 98.2 (2000):183–210; see also Bruster, "Female–Female Eroticism," 7–13; Ellen M. Caldwell, "John Lyly's *Gallathea*: A New Rhetoric of Love for the Virgin Queen," *English Literary Renaissance* 17.1 (1987):33; and Joseph W. Houppert, *John Lyly*, Twayne's English Authors Series 177 (Boston: Twayne Publisher, 1975), 86. Christopher Wixson adds the notion of rank to the mutuality between Gallathea and Phyllida, suggesting that class conformity as much as gender parity signifies their compatibility. Christopher Wixson, "Crossing-Dressing and John Lyly's *Gallathea*," *SEL Studies in English Literature 1500–1900* 41.2 (2001):241–56. For theories on the implications of reading

- homoerotic narratives through gender likeness see Farwell, *Heterosexual Plots*, 20; and Toni McNaron, "Mirrors and Likeness: A Lesbian Aesthetic in the Making," in *Sexual Practice, Textual Theory: Lesbian Cultural Criticism*, ed. Susan J. Wolfe and Julia Penelope (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1993), 291–306.
36. Laurie Shannon, *Sovereign Amity: Figures of Friendship in Shakespearean Contexts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 94–95.
 37. Traub makes this argument regarding Phebe's attraction to Rosalind. See Traub, *Desire & Anxiety*, 125.
 38. The line reads, "Seeing we are both boyes, and both lovers, that our affection may have some showe, and seeme as it were love, let me call thee Mistris" (sig. F3).
 39. Freeburg, *Disguise Plots*, 80–91.
 40. In 1999, Kate D. Levin directed a college production of *Gallathea*. Her assessment of the characters in performance, which she argues directly contradicts scholarly judgments that they are dispassionate and static, was that they developed a complex emotional relationship. Kate D. Levin, "Playing with Lyly: Theatrical Criticism and Non-Shakespearean Drama," *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama* 40 (2001):32. Similarly, Kent Cartwright has argued that *Gallathea* is not the "static, intellectual drama of ideas" that scholars have claimed but a more popularly theatrical piece that provides "emotional and visceral delight" through the pleasure of "confusion." He sites the attractive physical embarrassment of their first meeting and the willful uncertainty of their gender deferral as indications of the titillating pleasure they find in gender confusion. Cartwright, "The Confusions of *Gallathea*: John Lyly as Popular Dramatist," *Comparative Drama* 32.2 (1998):208, 217–19.
 41. Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500–1800* (London: Harper & Row, 1977), 31. Stone explains that these agreements were as binding as the marriage ceremony. Therefore, this oath effectively unites *Gallathea* and *Phyllida* before the play concludes.
 42. Joel B. Altman, *The Tudor Play of Mind: Rhetorical Inquiry and the Development of Elizabethan Drama* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 207–09; Susan C. Kemper, "Dramaturgical Design in Lyly's *Gallathea*," *THOTH* (Fall 1976):29–30; Caldwell, "Lyly's *Gallathea*," 39n; Houppert, *John Lyly*, 93; Rackin, "Androgyny," 37; R. S. White, "Metamorphosis by Love in Elizabethan Romance, Romantic Comedy, and Shakespeare's Early Comedies," *The Review of English Studies* 35 (1984):26; Jacqueline A. Vanhoutte, "Sacrifice, Violence and the Virgin Queen in Lyly's *Gallathea*," *Cahiers Élisabéthains* 49 (1996):8–10; and Jankowski, *Pure Resistance*, 26.
 43. The script does touch on the fact that Melebeus is incestuously attracted to his daughter *Phyllida* (sig. E4v).

44. Houppert mentions this homoerotic circle as a variation on the traditional love triangle. See Houppert, *John Lyly*, 85.
45. Charles H. Gray, ed., *Lodowick Carliell, His Life A Discussion of His Plays and "The Deserving Favourite"* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1905), 18–29.
46. The prologue to the second part of *The Passionate Lovers* paints Carlell as a leisured courtier. See also Harbage on the privileges associated with Carlell's position. Harbage, *Cavalier Drama*, 95–96.
47. Gray, *Lodowick Carliell*, 31–36; Harbage, *Cavalier Drama*, 10, 96; and Karen Wood, "Lodowick Carlell," in *Jacobean and Caroline Dramatists*, ed. Fredson Bowers, DLB v. 58 (Detroit: Gale Research, 1987), 45–50. Carlell, like other courtier playwrights wanting to establish a connection with the king and elevate their scripts, flattered Charles as the inspirational source for one of his plays. The King's epilogue to part one of *The Passionate Lovers* reads, in part, "If what hath been presented to your sense / You do approve, thank your own influence: / Which moving in the story that you told, / Infus'd new heat into a brain grown cold."
48. Margaret Barnard Pickel, *Charles I as Patron of Poetry and Drama* (London: Frederick Muller, 1936), 105.
49. Stephen Orgel and Roy Strong, eds, *Inigo Jones, The Theatre of the Stuart Court: including the complete designs for productions at court, for the most part in the collection of the Duke of Devonshire, together with their texts and historical documentation* (London: Sotheby Parke Bernet, 1973), 724–26. This book includes sketches by Jones for a court production of *The Passionate Lovers*.
50. Harbage, *Cavalier Drama*, 39–40. See also Franceschina, *Homosexualities*, 94.
51. Erica Veevers, *Images of Love and Religion: Queen Henrietta Maria and Court Entertainments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 14–47.
52. *Ibid.*, 51–56, 67–69.
53. Carlisle established herself as the focus of a salon that became a powerful court faction with political aspirations. See Julie Sanders, "Caroline Salon Culture and Female Agency: The Countess of Carlisle, Henrietta Maria, and Public Theatre," *Theatre Journal* 52.4 (2000):452–53. See also Veevers, *Images of Love*, 37–39. Both Sanders and Veevers are careful to point out that platonic love and *préciosité* were not static forms, but shifted with changes in place, time, and practitioners. Therefore, the practice as articulated in French circles is not the same as that expressed by various circles in the English court.
54. Andreadis, *Sappho in Early Modern England*, 57.
55. *Ibid.*, 2, 11, 27–53.
56. Did Carlell's work, in fact, influence later writers like Philips and Aphra Behn? The pseudonym Philips used, Orinda, is similar to Carlell's

- most overtly homoerotic character, Olinda from *The Passionate Lovers*. Behn's provocatively homoerotic poem, "To the Fair Clarinda, Who Made Love to Me, Imagin'd More Than Woman," uses one of the character names from Carlell's *The Deserving Favorite*. See Lillian Faderman, *Chloe Plus Olivia: An Anthology of Lesbian Literature from the Seventeenth Century to the Present* (New York: Penguin Book, 1994), 27.
57. Philip Edwards, et al., *The Revels History of Drama in English*, vol. IV, 1613–1660 (London: Methuen, 1981), 158–59.
 58. Gray, *Lodowick Carlell*, 48–49; Harbage, *Cavalier Drama*, 96–97.
 59. Carlell complains, with feigned humility, in the dedication to the printed edition that the company took his play for public performance without his knowledge.
 60. Franceschina examines the homoerotic bonds between male characters in this and several other works by Carlell. See Franceschina, *Homosexualities*, 98–100.
 61. *Ibid.*, 98–99. Franceschina briefly mentions the homosocial bond between Cleonarda and Clarinda, but fails to explore the homoerotic impact of their relationship.
 62. Lodowick Carlell, *The Deserving Favorite. As it was lately Acted, first before the Kings Majestie, and since publicly at the Black-Friers. By his Majesies Seruants. Written by Lodowicke Carlell, Esquire, Gentle-man of the Bowes, and Groome of the King and Queenes Privie Chamber* (London, 1629). Subsequent quotations are from this edition.
 63. Castle, *Apparitional Lesbian*, 45.
 64. Jankowski, *Pure Resistance*, 8–28.
 65. In this play, as in Davenant's *The Platonic Lovers*, the line between sexual love and platonic or familial love is slender and ambiguous.
 66. See Castle, *Apparitional Lesbian*, 66–74.
 67. Veevers, *Images of Love*, 67.
 68. Andreadis, *Sappho in Early Modern England*, 55–82. See also Shannon, *Sovereign Amity*, 94–95.
 69. Surprisingly, neither Michael Shapiro's excellent study on the female page nor Victor Freeburg's early work on disguise plots in early modern drama references Carlell's play. See Shapiro, *Gender in Play*, 221–23; and Freeburg, *Disguise Plots*, 61–99.
 70. According to court records, performances of part 1 occurred on 10 July and 18 December 1638, with part 2 following on 20 and 27 December. Pickel, *Charles I as Patron*, 108–09. See also Gerald Eades Bentley, *The Jacobean and Caroline Stage: Plays and Playwrights*, vol. 3 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), 122.
 71. The 1655 edition is the only extant version of *The Passionate Lovers*. The first critical edition, prepared as a dissertation at Rice University, appeared in 1963, which might explain why both Shapiro and Freeburg seem unaware of it. See Gene Stephenson Ewton, *A Critical Edition of "The Passionate Lovers" by Lodowick Carlell* (diss.,

- Rice University, 1963). The King's Men listed the title among plays they owned and prohibited from publication. See Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, 122.
72. Harbage, *Annals*, 136–37.
 73. Lodowick Carlell, *The Passionate Lovers, A Tragi-Comedy, The First and Second Parts. Twice presented before the King and Queens Majesties at Somerset-House, and very often at the Private House in Black-Friars, with great Applaus, by his Majesties Servants. Written by Lodowick Carlell, Gent* (London, 1655). Subsequent quotations are from this edition.
 74. In plays like *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night*, *James IV*, *Love's Riddle* and *No Wit, No Help Like a Woman's*, women in love with cross-dressed characters almost instantly relinquish them after the narrative exposes the disguise. Even in Ford's *The Lover's Melancholy*, although Thamasta hesitates and acknowledges her attraction to Eroclea, she eventually accepts Menaphon. The one exception of course, besides Carlell's play, is John Lyly's *Gallathea*.
 75. Olivia rejoices at having gained a sister as well as a husband in *Twelfth Night*. In Robert Greene's *James IV* the desiring Lady Anderson tells Dorothea, "Although not as I desired, I love you well." See Greene, *James IV*, 114.
 76. For the homoerotic implications of Antonio in *Twelfth Night*, see Joseph Pequigney, "The Two Antonios and Same-Sex Love in *Twelfth Night* and *The Merchant of Venice*," *ELR* 22 (1992):201–21.
 77. Theodora Jankowski, "... in the Lesbian Void," 299–319; and Jessica Tvordi, "Female Alliance and the Construction of Homoeroticism in *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*," in *Maids and Mistresses, Cousins and Queens: Women's Alliances in Early Modern England*, ed. Susan Frye and Karen Robertson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 114–30.

CONCLUSION

1. Maurice Charney, *Shakespeare on Love and Lust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 211.
2. See Michael J. B. Allen and Valery Rees, eds, *Marsilio Ficino: His Theology, His Philosophy, his Legacy*, with Martin Davies (Boston: Brill, 2002), 107–09. For Ficino, physical love had merit because of its procreative powers and was essentially good. However, according to him, humans tend to abuse physical love, which consequently distracts them from the pursuit of divine ideals and therefore renders physical love evil. Marsilio Ficino, *Commentary on Plato's Symposium on Love*, trans. Sears Jayne (Dallas: Spring Publications, 1985), 118–19.
3. Comic theories by both Henri Bergson and Umberto Eco argue that one function of comedy is to correct unsociable behavior. They both find certain kinds of comedy to be an instrument of social control. See Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*,

trans. Cloudesley Brereton and Fred Rothwell (New York: Macmillan, 1924), 197 and Umberto Eco, "The Frames of Comic 'Freedom,' " in *Carnival!*, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok (New York: Mouton Publishers, 1984), 1–9.

4. On romantic friendship see Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America," *Signs* 1.1 (1975): 1–29. While Smith-Rosenberg's work focused specifically on Victorian America, it has generated debate on the scholarship of relations between women across historical and geographical locations. At one time unfairly critiqued for what later scholars assumed was an insistence on the asexuality of female relationships before the twentieth century, Smith-Rosenberg is now considered a pioneer in the historical exploration of female sexuality and queer history. See Leila J. Rupp, "Women's History in the New Millennium: Carroll Smith-Rosenberg's 'The Female World of Love and Ritual' after Twenty-five Years," *Journal of Women's History* 12.3 (2000):8–33.

APPENDIX

Authors and first dates of production (or authorship) are taken from Alfred Harbage, *Annals of English Drama*, Revised S. Schoenbaum (London: Methuen, 1964).

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